

MMI RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

THE SECOND MIND MATTERS
INITIATIVE RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

**VETERINARY MENTAL HEALTH:
THE EVIDENCE BASE**

AGENDA & ABSTRACTS

24 SEPTEMBER 2019
CHURCH HOUSE, WESTMINSTER





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WELCOME

Dear colleague

I would like to extend a very warm welcome to Church House in Westminster and this, our second Mind Matters Initiative Research Symposium – ‘Veterinary mental health: the evidence base’.

The Mind Matters Initiative has three streams of activity: prevent, protect and support. You can read more about this on page 21. While we recognise that supporting those in need is critical, we have always had a clear focus on trying to reduce the incidence of mental ill-health and poor wellbeing by looking at potential interventions at both a personal and a systemic level. And these need to be informed by the best available evidence, both from within the profession and beyond it. So, I am delighted that today’s symposium brings together so much exciting research that will support us, and others, in developing interventions that really will make a difference to the mental health and wellbeing of those in the veterinary team.

The breadth of research we will hear from today covers veterinary surgeons working in different types of practice, and at different stages in their careers. We are also delighted to welcome speakers from the USA, Canada and the Netherlands, recognising that the issues we face are truly global, and that only by working together will we stand the best chance of bringing about real positive change within the international veterinary family.

Many thanks to Rosie Allister for bringing together such an exciting programme for us today, and to the Mind Matters team, especially Lisa Quigley, and the RCVS Communications team, for organising what I am sure will be a thought-provoking and stimulating day.

Enjoy the day, and please contribute your thoughts and ideas during the question and answer sessions: today is about all of us, not just our excellent speakers!

Best wishes

Professor Susan Dawson
Chair, RCVS Mind Matters Initiative



I am delighted that today’s symposium brings together so much exciting research that will support us, and others, in developing interventions that really will make a difference to the mental health and wellbeing of those in the veterinary team.

PROGRAMME



24th September 2019 | Church House, London Veterinary mental health: the evidence base

0930-1000	Registration
1000-1010	Welcome: Lizzie Lockett
1010-1050	Plenary 1: Stuart Reid The Mind Matters Initiative - what we've achieved so far Professor Stuart Reid
1050-1110	Coffee and assemble for research sessions

STREAM A HOARE MEMORIAL HALL		STREAM B BISHOP PARTRIDGE HALL	
1110-1210	Research sessions	1110-1210	Research sessions
1110-1130	Government Veterinarians Wellbeing – A Veterinary Profession Wellbeing Case Study Dr Rebeca Garcia Pinillos	1110-1130	2018 WSAVA Mental Health Survey results. How the VetsinMind app will support the identified issues Dr Nienke Endenburg
1130-1150	Positive and negative mental health impacts of experiences associated with livestock veterinary practice Dr Kate Stephen	1130-1150	Improving Resilience in Veterinary Students: A Final-Year Resilience Rotation Dr Colleen Best
1150-1210	Aspects of work influence new graduate mental health: opportunities for intervention Dr Rosie Allister	1150-1210	Evaluation of Workplace Wellbeing and Culture Across the Veterinary Profession through Supported Practice Surveys Carolyn Crowe
1210-1220	Assemble for plenary		
1220-1300	Plenary 2: The impact of veterinarian suicide on colleagues Dr Alexandra Pitman		

1300-1400	Lunch and poster viewing - Posters available to view during lunch:
	Small Animal Practice Veterinary Surgeons' Quit Intentions: A Qualitative Investigation Jo Kelly - Author available at poster 1330-1345 for questions
	Should clinicians always do what they can? - utilising the Animal Welfare Assessment Grid as a decision-making tool to improve mental health. Rachel Malkani and Professor Sarah Wolfensohn - Authors available at poster 1330-1345 for questions
1400-1440	Plenary 3: Sustaining resilience at work – what does the evidence tell us works? Professor Neil Greenberg
1440-1500	Refreshments

STREAM A HOARE MEMORIAL HALL		STREAM B BISHOP PARTRIDGE HALL	
1500-1600	Research sessions:	1500-1600	Research sessions
1500-1520	Suicides and Deaths of Undetermined Intent Among Veterinary Professionals, National Violent Death Reporting System, 2003-2014 Dr Randall Nett	1500-1520	Burnout in veterinarians; a critical review of the prevalence, contributory factors and interventions Dr Joanna Dyer
1520-1540	Key Findings of the MSD Animal Health Veterinary Wellbeing Study John Volk	1520-1540	The relationship between psychosocial work environment and mental health in veterinary practitioners: a scoping review Dr Linda Hoinville
1540-1600	Mental Health of Veterinarians in Canada Dr Colleen Best	1540-1600	How unease and stress can become confidence and harmony through non-technical competencies continuing professional development Dr Tierney Kinnison, Professor Stephen May

1600	Assemble for final session
1600-1630	Closing session: Susan Dawson

PLENARY SPEAKERS

mind matters

The Mind Matters Initiative – what we’ve achieved so far

Professor Stuart Reid, Principal, Royal Veterinary College; outgoing Chair of the Mind Matters Initiative

Stuart is Principal of the Royal Veterinary College (RVC), University of London. An alumnus of the University of Glasgow, he became one of its youngest professors in 1996 and Dean in 2005 before moving to the RVC in 2011.

Stuart is an RCVS recognised specialist in veterinary epidemiology and in veterinary public health by the European Board of Veterinary Specialists, and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Biology and the Royal Society of Edinburgh. His research interests are focused on zoonotic disease and antimicrobial resistance. He has over 160 scientific publications, most recently in PNAS and Science, and has secured over £15M in competitive funding.

Stuart was President of the RCVS in 2014-15. He has also been president of the European College of Veterinary Public Health and Hon Secretary of the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges.

In his public service, he has been a trustee of The Donkey Sanctuary since 1996 and Chairman of Trustees since 2007. He is a Trustee of the University of London and sits on the Board of the Food Standards Agency in the UK.

Stuart has been recognised for his work by industry (Pfizer, Petplan Charitable Trust), the profession (the British Veterinary Association’s Wooldridge Medal and the Dalrymple-Champneys Cup), his alma mater (the McCall Lecture, University of Glasgow) and his discipline in the UK, EU and USA.

His interest in mental health and wellbeing is both personal and professional; he raised £14k for mental health charities by running the London Marathon in 2015 and chaired the Mind Matters Initiative for the RCVS from 2017 to 2019.

He was made a CBE in the Queen’s Birthday Honours in 2018 for services to the veterinary profession and higher education.



Lizzie Lockett, RCVS Chief Executive and Director of Mind Matters Initiative

Lizzie joined the RCVS in February 2005 as Head of Communications, bringing with her 13 years’ experience working in marketing, public relations, communications and public affairs both in the UK and across Europe.

As Head of Communications, and later Director of Strategic Communications, Lizzie and her team were responsible for all of the College’s communications, including media, publications, events, web and digital, design and public affairs. Lizzie was also responsible for managing the RCVS side of the joint RCVS/British Veterinary Association project, Vet Futures.

In autumn 2014, Lizzie set up the Mind Matters Initiative (MMI), alongside its then Chair, Neil Smith. Lizzie took up the role of Acting CEO in September 2017 and was appointed CEO in November 2017.

Lizzie is an Accredited PR Practitioner with the Chartered Institute of Public Relations and holds a degree in English Language and Literature from St John’s College, Oxford, a postgraduate qualification in journalism, and diplomas in the History of Art, also from Oxford.



The impact of veterinarian suicide on colleagues

Dr Alexandra Pitman, Associate Professor in Psychiatry in the UCL Division of Psychiatry and an Honorary Consultant Psychiatrist at Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust

Alexandra is an Associate Professor in Psychiatry in the UCL Division of Psychiatry and an Honorary Consultant Psychiatrist at Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust. Her research interests are in the epidemiology of suicide and self-harm, particularly in relation to suicide loss, loneliness and social isolation, and in developing approaches to prevent suicide. She is funded by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention to investigate mediators of suicide risk after suicide bereavement and co-leads, with Professor Sonia Johnson, the ESRC-funded Loneliness and Social Isolation in Mental Health network.



Sustaining resilience at work – what does the evidence tell us works?

Professor Neil Greenberg, Professor of Defence Mental Health, Consultant Academic Psychiatrist at King’s College London, Chair of the Royal College of Psychiatrists’ (RCP) Special Interest Group in Occupational Psychiatry

Neil is a consultant academic psychiatrist at King’s College London. Neil served in the United Kingdom Armed Forces for more than 23 years and has deployed to a number of hostile environments including Afghanistan and Iraq. He took up the Chair of the Royal College of Psychiatrists’ (RCP) Special Interest Group in Occupational Psychiatry in October 2018.

In 2008 he was awarded the Gilbert Blane Medal by the Royal Navy for his work in supporting the health of Naval personnel through his research work. He also led the team that won a military-civilian partnership award in 2013 for carrying out research into the psychological health of troops who were deployed and was shortlisted for the RCP Psychiatrist of the Year in 2015. He was awarded an RCP Presidential Medal for his work with trauma and veterans in 2017.

Neil has published more than 200 scientific papers and book chapters. He has presented to national and international audiences on matters concerning the psychological health of the UK Armed Forces, organisational management of traumatic stress and occupational mental health. He has been the Secretary of the European Society for Traumatic Stress Studies and the President of the UK Psychological Trauma Society. He is the current RCP Lead for Military and Veterans Health, a trustee with Walking with the Wounded, an independent director of the Forces in Mind Trust and a principal advisor for Hostage UK.



Closing session

Professor Susan Dawson, Dean of the Institute of Veterinary Science at the University of Liverpool; incoming Mind Matters Initiative Chair

Susan is Dean of the Institute of Veterinary Science at the University of Liverpool. She qualified as a veterinary surgeon from Glasgow in 1983 and spent several years in veterinary practice before joining the University of Liverpool in 1988. Her research is in the area of infectious diseases with a focus on zoonotic infections and antimicrobial resistance in particular.

Since taking on the role of Dean of the Institute of Veterinary Science, Susan has led the introduction of a new curriculum to the BVSc programme and has managed a significant increase in student numbers onto the programme.

Susan is currently a Council member of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS). She has chaired Education Committee for RCVS and has been a panel member and chair of accreditation visits of veterinary schools on behalf of the Royal College. Susan currently chairs Primary Qualifications Subcommittee at RCVS and was voted in as chair of Veterinary Schools Council in July 2019.

Susan has been a member of the Mind Matters Initiative Taskforce since its instigation and is proud to take over as chair from Professor Stuart Reid in September 2019.





SHORT TALKS ABSTRACTS

The following abstracts are ordered alphabetically by surname, for the running order, please refer to the programme on [pages 6-7](#).

Aspects of work influence new graduate mental health: opportunities for intervention

Dr Rosie Allister

Rosie qualified from The University of Liverpool vet school. For over ten years she has been based at the University of Edinburgh researching veterinary professionals' mental health with particular interests in professional identity, the transition to practice, support, and what helps. She manages Vetlife Helpline and has been a volunteer with Samaritans for 14 years.

Background

The Veterinary Transition Study (VTS) is a prospective cohort study investigating the transition from student to veterinary surgeon. The veterinary profession has a suicide rate three times that of the general population and the transition to practice is a time of particularly poor wellbeing in veterinary working life. The study aimed to understand new graduate vets' experiences of mental health and support during the transition to professional work, and the development of professional identity.

Methods

This is a qualitative study following 36 participants through their first two years in practice. It is an interview study with data analysed thematically. 97 interviews have been completed over three years.

Results

- This study found that:
- Features of veterinary training and veterinary work have unintended consequences for wellbeing and aspects of veterinary culture act to increase risk
 - Specific factors moderated whether people seek support, and beliefs around support, potentially offering opportunities for intervention and help
 - Risk profile changes during transition to practice; some of our assumptions about risk may be incorrect
 - The right support in practice can mitigate risk at transition including for people who have experienced suicidal thoughts and behaviour before

Mental health of veterinarians in Canada

Dr Colleen Best

Colleen earned her Doctor of Veterinary Medicine and PhD from the Ontario Veterinary College (OVC). After completing her DVM degree, Colleen practised equine medicine before returning to OVC to complete her PhD in interpersonal relationships in equine practice, using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. She has presented at a number of international conferences about her research, as well as veterinarian-client and collegial communication. Most recently, Colleen has taught and researched nontechnical competencies, including veterinarian-client communication, wellness and resilience, at the Ontario Veterinary College. She is a certified compassion fatigue professional, a member of the board of the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association, and trained in mental health first aid and suicide intervention.

Background

While several reports worldwide have highlighted concerns with depression, anxiety, and suicide in veterinarians, little research has focused on veterinarian mental health in Canada.

Objectives

To estimate the prevalence of perceived stress, anxiety, depression, compassion satisfaction, secondary traumatic stress, burnout, resilience, and suicidal ideation among Canadian veterinarians, and to compare results with normative populations where comparative data were available.

Hypothesis

The prevalence of negative and positive mental health outcomes will be higher and lower, respectively, in veterinarians in Canada, compared to the general population.

Methods

A cross-sectional online survey was administered to Canadian veterinarians from February to July 2017. The questionnaire contained validated psychometric scales to measure perceived stress, anxiety, depression, compassion satisfaction, secondary traumatic stress, burnout, and resilience, and suicidal ideation, as well as questions regarding suicidal ideation and additional data to describe the study population.

Results

Results for anxiety, depression, secondary traumatic stress, burnout, and suicidal ideation were significantly higher amongst

participating veterinarians compared to normative populations, while the average participant resilience score was significantly lower. Participants who identified as female fared worse on several mental health outcomes than those who identified as males.

Discussion

These results highlight concerns around anxiety, depression, secondary traumatic stress, burnout, low resilience, and suicidal ideation amongst veterinarians in Canada. Resilience training interventions have been shown effective in similar professions and are recommended.

Conclusion

The findings of this study are concerning and serve as a call to action for supports and educational programmes for veterinarian mental health in Canada.

Improving resilience in veterinary students: a final-year resilience rotation

Dr Colleen Best

See above for biography.

Background

Veterinarians face a myriad of occupational stresses and poor mental health is of increasing concern in the veterinary profession. Resilience can be taught to help people bounce back from adversity, yet few resilience programmes have been evaluated in the veterinary population.

Objectives

To create, implement, and evaluate a one-week rotation to help final-year veterinary students develop skills, knowledge, and attributes that support their wellness and resilience.

Research question

Can a one-week experiential learning rotation effectively improve wellness and resilience outcomes in final-year veterinary students?

Method

The rotation was created using an experiential learning model with emphasis on student discussion and engagement. Content centred on emotional intelligence and eight wellness dimensions. Combined with leadership activities, session topics included personal values, strengths, boundaries, assertiveness, self-

compassion, yoga, nutrition, money management, meaning and purpose, and mind-body techniques. Daily reflection questions were used to stimulate thought and support content integration.

Results

A formal evaluation of rotation effectiveness is underway. Feedback from rotation evaluations indicated that students found the rotation beneficial (e.g. "We were taught valuable life skills that will help us not only be better veterinarians but also better happier versions of ourselves"). Students have recommended the rotation to their peers, and enrolment has remained constant or increased.

Discussion

Student and faculty feedback for a one-week resilience rotation support continued use of the training.

Conclusion

Preliminary results indicate that the provision of a rotation focused on the practice of resilience skills is a valuable addition to the veterinary curriculum.

Evaluation of workplace wellbeing and culture across the veterinary profession through supported practice surveys

Carolyn Crowe

Carolyn is an experienced equine vet, an award-winning personal performance coach, international speaker, researcher and lecturer. She has a Master's degree in Workplace Health and Wellbeing and continues to do research in veterinary team health, wellbeing, performance, and engagement. She is a master trainer in DISC behavioural profiling, a CPCAB trainer in Stress Management and Wellbeing, a certified trainer in Resilience, a Mental Health First Aider and an Honorary Lecturer at the University of Liverpool.

After successfully running her coaching and training business for several years, Carolyn works as a training consultant with the VDS Training (VDST) Team; developing training and coaching individuals, teams, and practices to be the best they can be and to thrive both personally and professionally.

Background

There is currently no single source of data on workplace stress within the veterinary profession. Trends are therefore



SHORT TALKS ABSTRACTS

extrapolated from either non-veterinary data or from surveys carried out at individual rather than organisational level. This makes it hard to establish and drive out best practice across the profession or to deliver targeted interventions.

Aims

The objective of this project is twofold: 1) to provide employers with a fully-supported solution for risk-assessing and improving workplace stress that fulfils their legal obligations and is easy to implement and 2) to create a database of information on wellbeing and culture that will identify trends and challenges across the profession, within different sectors and types of practice.

Method

From June 2019, surveys will be conducted by practices using an anonymous online tool developed by VDST which is based on the HSE Management Standards indicator tool, WHO-5 and Utrecht 3 questionnaires. Data will be collated from all members of the practice to allow the key risks to each team to be identified (e.g. veterinary surgeons, registered veterinary nurses, administrative team etc). VDST will provide tangible, relevant data to the practice about their specific strengths and challenges around all aspects of workplace stress and wellbeing, supporting and developing employers through the process as well as delivering local ownership. The data collected will inform wider discussions across the profession with evidence-based research and will benchmark effectiveness of interventions and initiatives at a local and national level.

Results

An initial indication of the trends and results gathered to date will be presented.

Burnout in veterinarians; a critical review of the prevalence, contributory factors and interventions

Dr Joanna Dyer

Jo graduated from Bristol University and has been in small-animal practice ever since. She has always had an interest in the mental wellbeing of veterinary professionals, but since selling her practice and seeing her children launched in life, she has had more time to spend on indulging this interest. This has led to getting involved with Vetlife in various ways, and being elected to RCVS with a focus on the welfare of vets. She has also

recently completed an MSc in the Psychology and Neuroscience of Mental Health with King's College London, which included a dissertation on work-related stress and burnout in veterinarians

Background

Burnout is a condition that can occur as a result of chronic workplace stress, and has been described as an 'occupationally-specific dysphoria'. The three aspects of the syndrome are emotional exhaustion; the development of negative attitudes towards clients (depersonalisation); and the perception of reduced personal efficacy.

The practising UK veterinary profession is suffering a retention crisis; burnout levels are reported to be high: and, veterinarians report higher levels of work-related stress than the general population.

Aims

To review the literature relating to burnout in veterinarians, including the prevalence, contributory factors and interventions which have been assessed for prevention or reversal of the condition.

Methods

A literature review was performed using a combination of search strategies in order to achieve a comprehensive critical review.

Results

A burnout rate of between 27% and 50% was found in veterinarians studied, depending on the measurement method used. Contributory factors were found to be workplace stressors including long working hours, client expectations and negative work-home interaction. Few interventions have been assessed; those that have, include individual interventions such as resilience training and mindfulness-based programmes, but no workplace-related interventions.

Conclusion

Work-related stress and burnout are found to be at higher levels in veterinarians than in the general population. Studies into interventions have all been individual-focused and non-UK based. There is a need to study workplace-based interventions in the UK in order to reduce levels of burnout which are damaging to individuals and to veterinary businesses.

2018 WSAVA Mental Health Survey results; how the Vets in Mind app will support the identified issues

Dr Nienke Endenburg

Nienke is a child and health psychologist and received her PhD for work on the human-animal relationship at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at Utrecht University, the Netherlands. Since 1991 she has been carrying out research and teaches in the same Faculty on the welfare of humans and animals, and their relationship in different contexts and cultures.

She is currently working as an assistant professor in the academic world and trying to translate scientific evidence into practical information to optimise animal and human welfare. She has an international and national network in both the veterinary and psychological fields. She is also carrying out education within different professions in One Welfare, in different countries and languages (Dutch, English and German).

Nienke has extensive postgraduate and clinical experience in health and child psychology, acknowledged by the Dutch government. She is also the owner of her own psychology practice, and counsels veterinary students and practising veterinarians about professional wellness. She is member of the Dutch Council for Animal Affairs, the co-chair of the Professional Wellness Group of the World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA) and a member of the Animal Welfare Guidelines committee. She was a former member of the Animal Welfare and Wellness Committee of WSAVA.

Background

Personal and professional wellness of veterinarians and veterinary staff are rightly receiving increased attention. Recent suicides of veterinarians and veterinary nurses have caused consternation within the profession. Most scientific studies regarding professional wellness have so far been done in the western world (USA, UK and Australia), but to date little has been from other parts of the world.

Method

An online survey, translated into seven languages was launched at the WSAVA World Conference in Singapore and promoted to WSAVA and Federation of Companion Animal Veterinary Associations (FECAVA) member associations and through to their members during the four month data collection period ending 31 December 2019.

Results

4,306 veterinarians responded to the survey. The majority responded in English (n=2,942) and Russian (n= 1,222). The other respondents used Spanish, French, Portuguese, Chinese and Korean. And although the data are currently being analysed it is clear that morbidity of mental health issues is significant all over the world. The results will be presented at the conference.

A number of initiatives are helping veterinarians cope with mental health issues but none so far are available via an app. The Vets in Mind app has been derived from a similar version (BackupBuddy) successfully used in the UK police and military. The app will complement the other excellent support structures available and enable the profession to have access to high quality information to support themselves and colleagues; to reduce stigma surrounding mental health, and to signpost users to credible support services in their regions around the world all via their smartphones.

Government veterinarians' wellbeing – a veterinary profession wellbeing case study

Dr Rebeca Garcia Pinillos

Rebeca qualified as a vet at the University of Zaragoza and completed a PhD at the University of Reading. She has worked in private practice as a small animal and equine vet as well as an Official Veterinarian and Veterinary Adviser on a number of subject matters for the Food Standards Agency (FSA), the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA). Rebeca has also volunteered with exotic animals in a number of different countries. Rebeca has participated as an animal welfare specialist in several training events, workshops and conferences across the world. She currently works as Government Veterinary Adviser on animal welfare, is President for the Association of Government Vets and an active member of the European College on animal welfare and behavioural medicine specialised in Animal Welfare Science, Ethics and Law. Rebeca's presidential focus is on Government vets' wellbeing. Rebeca is also a passionate advocate of One Welfare and founder of an initiative to help define and disseminate this concept globally.

Background

This paper presents a summary of the UK Government Vet Wellbeing Survey 2018. The report was collated following a self-selected anonymous survey across vets undertaking work for government (including both those directly employed

SHORT TALKS ABSTRACTS

by government, under contract, and those working for other employers who deliver contracted government work), designed to assess opinions on various aspects of wellbeing including health and safety, workplace, and mental health.

Method

The survey ran from 17 March to 16 June 2018, disseminated via office notices, targeted emails, online blogs and social media, and received over 700 responses. Most replies originated from vets who have undertaken work for government for more than 10 years, working full time and spending the majority of their working time in the field.

Results

The report produced over 30 recommendations, and identified a number of tools in place supporting government veterinarians' wellbeing, areas where further work to share and disseminate existing resources would be beneficial and gaps that need to be explored further.

The relationship between psychosocial work environment and mental health in veterinary practitioners: a scoping review

Dr Linda Hoinville

Linda worked for two years in large animal practice before starting her career in research. She worked for 25 years as a veterinary epidemiologist, providing the evidence to inform the control of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies and the development of surveillance strategies. Having recently obtained a master's qualification in psychology she is now planning research to investigate improving the mental health and wellbeing of veterinary professionals.

Background

The high risk of suicide in veterinary practitioners and increased levels of psychological distress have been linked to aspects of their working environment.

Aims

This review aims to investigate the relationship between the psychosocial work environment and mental health in veterinary practitioners, and whether the relationships identified are consistent with existing occupational stress theories.

Research questions

1. Identify aspects of the work environment that are associated

- with mental health or wellbeing in veterinary practitioners;
2. Determine which of the existing occupational stress theories would be required to explain the relationships identified.

Methods

A narrative synthesis of relevant data extracted from empirical articles identified in a systematic search of MEDLINE, PsycINFO, Web of Science, Scopus using search terms related to mental health and work environment in veterinarians.

Results

The sixty-four articles identified suggest that general aspects of the work environment (workload, support, interpersonal relationships) and more profession-specific factors (performing euthanasia, ethical dilemmas) were associated with various mental health and wellbeing outcomes (anxiety, depression, burnout, job satisfaction).

Discussion

The development of a comprehensive model to describe the relationship between the work environment and mental health in veterinary practitioners would require the integration of several existing theories, including the demand-control-support, effort-reward imbalance, and job-demand-resources models.

Conclusion

This work, together with a review of interventions to improve mental health in healthcare staff, is an important first step in improving wellbeing in veterinary practitioners. It will provide a framework to inform the development and evaluation of individual and organisational level interventions.

How unease and stress can become confidence and harmony through non-technical competencies continuing professional development

Tierney Kinnison and Stephen A May

Tierney originally studied Animal Behaviour before undertaking several research positions at the Royal Veterinary College (RVC), within the Lifelong Independent Veterinary Education (LIVE) Centre, and the Veterinary Epidemiology, Economics and Public Health (VEEPH) Group. She conducted her PhD on interprofessional working, learning and education within the veterinary field from 2012-2015, and is now a Lecturer in Veterinary Education within the LIVE Centre, RVC. Tierney is especially interested in all things interprofessional, including the development

of interprofessional education (IPE) – bringing veterinary and veterinary nursing students together, to improve their collaboration, with future anticipated benefits for themselves, colleagues, clients and patients. Tierney is a founding member of the interprofessional education team (iPET), who are an interprofessional team of staff developing IPE, and which led to the creation of a student-led interprofessional education club (iPEC). She is therefore interested in not only the development and mental wellbeing of veterinary surgeons, but registered veterinary nurses, and the veterinary team as a whole.

Her research has focused on IPE specifically, as well as more general education topics. Her current teaching is primarily within the Postgraduate Certificate, Diploma and Masters in Veterinary Education, as well as developing IPE at the RVC.

Stephen received his veterinary degree from Cambridge in 1980. He has spent brief periods in general practice, and also worked as a specialist equine clinician. He completed his PhD on "Mediators of Equine Joint Disease" and was awarded Fellowship of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons for meritorious contributions to learning.

Stephen has been at the Royal Veterinary College since 1993, where he was Professor of Equine Medicine and Surgery for more than 20 years, before becoming the College's Professor of Education and Senior Vice-Principal. He is a recent past President of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and chairs its Graduate Outcomes, CPD and Legislation Working Groups.

He is a past President of the European Board of Veterinary Specialisation, having served on their Executive Committee for six years from 2011-2017, as well as a past President of the European College of Veterinary Surgeons.

Stephen is passionate about the development of veterinary surgeons of the future so that they not only survive but also thrive in clinical practice. He is interested in professional identity and capability and learning that supports this, including communication skills, leadership and team-working, scientific, clinical and ethical reasoning, and professionalism. He has pioneered new approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, and has extensive experience of curricular development and design, as well as quality assurance work in the UK, US and European systems. His research focuses on the scholarship of primary care, reflective practice and learning, professional development and assessment methods. He has authored more than 160 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters

on equine matters and veterinary education and training.

Background

The Certificate of Advanced Veterinary Practice (CertAVP), a form of continuing professional development (CPD), includes a professional key skills (PKS) module. Research utilising essays summarising learning from the PKS module identified that this opportunity had client/patient benefits, practice benefits and personal benefits. Personal benefits included reduced stress at work, leading to this follow-up study.

Aims and objectives

To identify all changes from 'negative' to 'positive' emotions associated with the PKS module, and to explore the context of the change.

Research question

How does completing the PKS module improve the emotional wellbeing of veterinary surgeons?

Methods

Consent was received from 46 participants to analyse their summaries. The focus of analysis was identification of a 'negative' to 'positive' emotional change regarding a specified topic. Thematic analysis was performed on sections of the summaries relating to these emotional changes.

Results

- Three themes were developed:
1. 'The PKS module': negative emotions such as 'reluctance' became positive, for example, 'stimulation' when participants realised the importance of non-technical competencies for their work.
 2. 'Developing non-technical competencies': participants wrote about learning new skills and changing emotions from 'unease' to 'confidence'.
 3. 'Stress and coping through a reflective focus': participants' reflections outlined coping mechanisms including cognitive reframing of self-do (reasonable expectations), self-feel (not alone) and the organisation (recognising stressors). Emotions changed from 'stress', 'guilt' and 'fatigue' to 'coping', 'enjoyment' and 'harmony'. Benefits for self, practice, colleagues/friends and client/patients were noted.

Conclusion

This research supports more attention to professional skills CPD in supporting the wellbeing of health professions.



SHORT TALKS ABSTRACTS

Suicides and deaths of undetermined intent among veterinary professionals, national violent death reporting system, 2003–2014

Dr Randall J Nett

Randall is Chief, Field Studies Branch, at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Morgantown, WV, USA.

Randall is a physician (Family Medicine and Preventive Medicine) and epidemiologist who conducts field epidemiologic studies and research concerning occupational lung diseases. Dr Nett practised clinical medicine in the United States Air Force before joining the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 2007 as an Epidemic Intelligence Service Officer. As a field officer stationed in Idaho and Montana, Randall conducted infectious disease-related outbreak investigations and disease surveillance. It is during this assignment that he spent time investigating risk factors for suicide among US veterinarians and developed an interest in veterinary professional wellbeing. Randall joined the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) in 2015 as a medical officer and currently serves as the Chief of the Field Studies Branch. Since joining NIOSH, Randall has continued collaborative research efforts regarding veterinarian suicides and wellbeing. Randall's other research interests include occupational lung diseases

Objective

Analyse data for veterinary professional decedents with manner of death characterised as suicide or undetermined intent.

Methods

Retrospective case review of National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) data, consisting of death certificates, coroner/medical examiner reports, and law enforcement reports, using the NVDRS to identify decedents employed as veterinarians, veterinary technicians/technologists, and veterinary assistants/laboratory animal caretakers (n = 189) during 2003–2014.

We calculated standardised mortality ratios (SMR) and 95% confidence intervals (CI) and compared mechanisms and circumstances of death among veterinary occupational groups.

Results

Among those employed at death, male (SMR=1.6 [95% CI=1.1–2.1]) and female (2.4 [1.2–3.6]) veterinarians, and male (5.0 [2.5–7.6]) and female (2.3 [1.6–3.1]) veterinary technicians/technologists had elevated SMRs for suicide compared with the general population, whereas male (0.8 [0.3–1.4]) and female (1.4 [0.7–2.1]) veterinary assistants/laboratory animal caretakers did not. Poisoning was the most common mechanism of death among veterinarians; pentobarbital was the most common substance used. Thirteen (72%) of the 18 veterinarian decedents who died from pentobarbital poisoning were injured at home. After removing decedents who died from pentobarbital poisoning from analyses, SMRs for male (1.1 [0.7–1.6]) and female veterinarians (1.5 [0.6–2.5]) were not different from the general population. This was not true for veterinary technicians/technologists.

Positive and negative mental health impacts of experiences associated with livestock veterinary practice.

Dr Kate Stephen

Kate is a Behavioural Scientist at the SRUC Epidemiology Research Unit, Inverness, in the Scottish Highlands. She has experience of mixed methods research in rural communities; the use of qualitative methods to collect sensitive data; development and evaluation of complex services and novel interventions, including eHealth; multi-disciplinary working; motivation and adherence to health behaviours.

Background

Veterinarians have been characterised as high achieving individuals with tendencies which can be risk factors for mental illness. Livestock vets may have a higher risk of depression as a result of relative social isolation. (Stoewen, 2015)

Aims

To understand how the challenges of livestock disease control impact the mental health of veterinarians.

Research question

What experiences associated with livestock veterinary practice negatively and positively impact on mental health and wellbeing of individual vets?

Methods

Transcripts of interviews with 10 livestock vets in the UK between Jan-Feb 2018 were analysed to identify impacts of disease control experiences on mental health and wellbeing.

Results

The vets recounted a significant range of challenges through their work which can have a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing; workload, witnessing and culling sick animals and associated distress in farmers, response (and lack of response) by farmers to advice given. They can question the efficacy of their role when there are negative outcomes and they may feel that they are being directly or indirectly blamed and may blame themselves.

Discussion

Although the job satisfaction in being a vet is evident, the positive impacts of their work are poorly recognised. It can be difficult for vets living in rural communities to separate their professional and social identities.

Conclusion

There is a need for mechanisms drawn from routine livestock practice to reinforce positive thoughts and emotions about the contribution of individual vets. Vets would benefit from tailored support to manage work-related challenges.

Key findings of the MSD Animal Health Veterinary Wellbeing Study

John Volk

John is senior consultant with Brakke Consulting, the largest consulting firm serving the global animal health, veterinary and pet care markets.

John is principal author of five landmark studies of the veterinary profession: Brakke Study of Financial and Economic Behaviors of Veterinarians (1998), AVMA-Pfizer Business Practices Study (2005), Bayer Veterinary Care Usage Studies (2011-2013), Veterinary Pet Insurance-Veterinary Economics Financial Health Study (2014), and the Merck Animal Health Veterinary Wellbeing study (2018).

He has been widely published in veterinary journals and is a frequent speaker at veterinary conferences. In January, John received the Pioneer Professional Award from VetPartners, the

association of veterinary practice consultants, in recognition of his vision and contributions to the business of veterinary medicine.

John is a graduate of the University of Illinois, where he earned a BS in agricultural communications and did graduate work in marketing. He also served on the faculty of the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine as communications director. He joined Brakke Consulting in 1994.

Background

Due to growing concerns in the veterinary profession about mental health, including issues such as depression, anxiety, compassion fatigue, burnout and suicide, MSD Animal Health sponsored a landmark study to definitively measure the mental health and wellbeing of US veterinarians. The MSD Animal Health Veterinary Wellbeing Study, conducted in cooperation with the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and Brakke Consulting, was the first broad-based, truly representative study of mental health and wellbeing. In addition, the veterinarian population was benchmarked to the US adult employed population.

Aims

- The goals were:
- 1) Definitely quantify the prevalence of serious psychological distress among veterinarians with comparisons to the US general population;
 - 2) Identify segments of the profession most at risk and determine factors that negatively and positively impact mental health; and
 - 3) Measure the level of wellbeing in the profession and identify factors that contribute to higher levels of wellbeing.

Results

Participants in this session will be briefed on the key findings of the study and gain a much deeper understanding of the current state of mental health and wellbeing in the US profession. The presentation also provides recommendations for what can be done at the organisational, practice and individual levels. The presentation will also preview a new study designed to measure changes in wellbeing and mental health over the last two years. Plus the new study will probe more deeply into key issues of concern identified in the original study.

POSTER ABSTRACTS

Small animal practice veterinary surgeons' quit intentions: a qualitative investigation

Jo Kelly

Jo is a small animal veterinary surgeon at a large multi-branch practice in the North East of England. She has seen first-hand the issues that face veterinary professionals in the workplace and is passionate about tackling work-related stress and poor mental wellbeing. In response to this she set up a group within her practice to champion wellbeing projects. Jo has undertaken and recently completed the Workplace Health and Wellbeing Master's with the University of Nottingham, during which she was awarded a scholarship.

Background

Poor mental wellbeing in veterinary surgeons is a recognised problem. Concomitant to this are challenges concerning the retention of veterinary surgeons in clinical practice. Survey research has demonstrated that more than 50% of recently graduated veterinary surgeons are looking for a change in work, with 10% planning to leave the profession altogether. The specific factors that drive intention to leave within this population are so far largely unexplored.

Job satisfaction and perceived work-life balance are predictors of intention to quit in other sectors and these, in addition to other wellbeing factors, will be explored.

Aims

The study aimed to explore the reasons given by small animal practice veterinary surgeons for intention to leave practice in favour of alternative careers. A further aim was to determine what interventions might encourage those considering exiting small animal practice to remain. A third aim is to use the

information gathered to enhance recruitment of small animal veterinary surgeons into clinical practice.

Methods

Fifteen face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with practising small animal veterinary surgeons in the spring of 2019. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Thematic analysis of the transcripts is currently underway in order to identify themes in the data pertinent to the aims of the study. Data analysis will be completed by August 2019 with the report on the study submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements of a Master's Degree in Workplace Health and Wellbeing in September 2019.

Results

Themes characterising the reasons vets intend to quit small animal practice will be identified. In addition, themes that illustrate factors associated with a desire to remain in practice will be established.

Should clinicians always do what they can? - utilising the Animal Welfare Assessment Grid as a decision-making tool to improve mental health

Rachel Malkani and Professor Sarah Wolfensohn

Rachel is a PhD student at the University of Surrey School of Veterinary Medicine and is developing the Animal Welfare Assessment Grid for dogs alongside Professor Sarah Wolfensohn. Rachel has an MSc in Animal Welfare Science, Ethics and Law from the University of Glasgow. She has a background in canine behaviour and is the Veterinary Engagement Officer for the British Veterinary Behaviour Association. She previously worked at

NewMetrica, assisting with quality of life research in cats and dogs and has strong research interests in companion animal welfare assessment and mental health in the veterinary profession.

Sarah's first degree was in Physiology from University College London, she then read Veterinary Medicine at Churchill College, Cambridge. She spent a number of years in general practice, both small animal and mixed, first as an assistant, then a partner, during which time the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 arrived. While still in general practice, she became Named Veterinary Surgeon for a number of small pharmaceutical and biotech companies in her local area and was then Head of Veterinary Services at the University of Oxford for nearly 20 years, leaving there in 2010.

She is now Professor of Animal Welfare at the veterinary school at the University of Surrey and also runs an independent consultancy on animal health and welfare. She holds the Diploma of the European College of Laboratory Animal Medicine, and the Diploma of the European College of Animal Welfare and Behavioural Medicine, and is a Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons Recognised Specialist in Laboratory Animal Science.

She has published textbooks and a numerous papers in the area of laboratory animal science and welfare, won the 2002 GSK Laboratory Animal Welfare prize for work on housing and husbandry of large primates used in research, won the 2010 EPAA communication prize and was awarded an OBE for services to animal welfare in 2012. She has served on a number of UK and International animal welfare and ethics committees to develop improvements to animal welfare.

Background

Veterinary surgeons are at high risk of mental health disorders and suicide. A risk factor contributing to suicidal behaviour and poor

mental health is cited to be coping with high client expectations (Bartram & Baldwin 2008). Stress ratings are highest when there is conflict between the welfare of the patient and the interests of the client (Batchelor & McKeegan 2012). Therefore, a tool that enables clinicians to make well-reasoned, ethically justified decisions, that promotes positive clinical experience is of critical importance in veterinary practice.

The Animal Welfare Assessment Grid (AWAG) (Wolfensohn et al. 2015) is a validated tool that monitors the welfare of animals and is highly adaptable to any species by assessing the four parameters of physical health, psychological wellbeing, environmental quality, and veterinary and management procedural events. The AWAG app software is currently being developed for companion dogs.

Aims

Assess the value of the AWAG as a treatment and end-of-life decision-making tool and examine if use of the tool improves mental health in veterinary surgeons.

Methods

Following development of the AWAG for dogs, the app will be assessed quantitatively and qualitatively for its effectiveness as a treatment decision tool. To assess the mental health impact of difficult decision-making, a variety of dimensions will be examined (burnout, fatigue, low mental and physical quality of life, depression, anxiety, and stress), using the Well-Being Index (WBI) (Dyrbye et al. 2013).

Hypotheses

We hypothesise that by enhancing the quality of decision-making, decisional conflict will be reduced; thereby, improving mental health in veterinary surgeons.

ABOUT MIND MATTERS

NOTES



The Mind Matters Initiative (MMI) aims to improve the mental health and wellbeing of those in the veterinary team, including students, veterinary nurses, veterinary surgeons and practice managers.

MMI began life in 2014 and was formally launched in 2015. It is funded and run by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), the regulatory body for veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses in the UK.

The RCVS takes the mental health and welfare of members of the veterinary profession seriously, and was kicked off with a five-year, one-million-pound commitment from the RCVS. During 2018, RCVS Council agree to extend the programme beyond its initial five years, on a rolling three-year basis.

Mind Matters is a pan-professional initiative, supported by a taskforce comprising representatives from key veterinary and veterinary nursing organisations, including:

- Association of Veterinary Students
- British Small Animal Veterinary Association
- British Veterinary Association
- British Veterinary Nursing Association
- Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons
- Veterinary Defence Society
- Veterinary Management Group
- Veterinary Schools Council
- Vetlife

We offer mental health awareness training and try to break down the stigma associated with mental ill-health. We also develop and support resources and courses to help students, vets, nurses and practice managers to flourish, and, when needed, to get back on form.

Our programme is divided into three streams of activity:

Prevent – proactively looking at systemic issues within the veterinary profession to help minimise the chance of people becoming unwell in the first place. Our joint anti-stigma campaign, &me, which we run with the Doctors' Support Network, also falls under this stream of activity.

Protect – a programme of communications and training designed to equip individuals with the skills and knowledge they need to stay well, even when working under challenging conditions.

Support – financial and other support for existing independent services, such as Vet Support NI, Vetlife Helpline and Vetlife Health Support, together with an investigation into what more may be required to support those in need, and catalysing the development of those services.

Mental health issues affect the veterinary team across the world, it's not just a UK situation. In recognition of the importance of supporting the veterinary family wherever it may be, we are starting to work internationally, and were delighted to sign a memorandum of understanding with the American Veterinary Medical Association in 2018.

Mind Matters is not your first port of call if you are in crisis or need direct and immediate help. If that is the case, please turn to the Vetlife Helpline, which we support, both financially and in kind. The Vetlife Helpline is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, on 0303 040 2551. There is also a confidential and anonymous email service, accessible via vetlife.org.uk

NOTES



The Mind Matters Initiative is run by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons
www.vetmindmatters.org
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