

# MMI RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

THE FOURTH MIND MATTERS  
INITIATIVE RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

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**AGENDA & ABSTRACTS**

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10 OCTOBER 2023  
BRIDGEWATER HALL, MANCHESTER

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# WELCOME

A very warm welcome to this fourth Mind Matters Initiative Research Symposium in the wonderful, modernist surroundings of the Bridgewater Hall, Manchester.

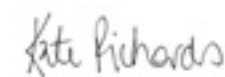
The conversations around mental health and wellbeing continue to grow louder, bringing greater awareness and understanding of the multiple manifestations of mental health experienced the world over. The issues are global, with the Covid pandemic creating new stressors and exacerbating existing conditions, and so the value of these conversations and the communication of research has never been more important.

This symposium brings together talented and experienced researchers from different professions, and I am delighted to welcome speakers from the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe, as well as from organisations across the UK. The presentations will include research projects spanning equity, diversity and inclusion, various types of veterinary practice, veterinary nursing and human medicine. This knowledge exchange reflects the ethos of the Mind Matters Initiative Taskforce of collaboration and sharing expertise to improve our understanding of mental health and to develop programmes to prevent, protect and support, as described on page 16.

While supporting those in need is fundamental, we strive to look upstream and develop initiatives to prevent and protect individuals before they reach the point where they need support. This is not only relevant to individuals working in veterinary teams, but for their employers. A physically and mentally healthy workforce supports animal health and welfare, as well as organisational performance. This is an event for everyone interested in supporting mental health in the veterinary sector, whether you are an employer, an employee, a clinician, a veterinary nurse, a researcher or in a non-clinical role, as well as early, mid or late career.

Huge thanks go to Rosie Allister, our MMI Symposium 2023 Organiser, and the Mind Matters Team for developing today's compelling programme, as well as the RCVS Communications and Events teams and all those who have contributed to creating this inspiring event. My thanks to you for attending and please participate during the sessions, sharing your knowledge and ideas to drive these initiatives forwards.

Best wishes,



**Dr Kate Richards**  
Chair, RCVS Mind Matters Initiative



**“The presentations will include research projects spanning equity, diversity and inclusion, various types of veterinary practice, veterinary nursing and human medicine.”**

# PROGRAMME



## Tuesday 10 October 2023 | Bridgewater Hall, Manchester MMI Research Symposium 2023: Programme

1000 – 1010	<b>Welcome:</b> Dr Kate Richards, <i>MMI Taskforce Chair, Mind Matters Initiative</i>
1010 – 1100	<b>Keynote &amp; Plenary address:</b> <b>Evidence-based care for people who have self-harmed: risk prediction, psychosocial assessments, and aftercare.</b> Dr Leah Quinlivan, <i>Research Fellow and Chartered Psychologist, University of Manchester</i>
1100 – 1120	<b>Morning Break</b>
1120 – 1240	<b>Sarah Brown Research Talks</b> <i>Session Chair: Dr Kate Richards</i>
1120 – 1125	<b>Sarah Brown Introduction</b> Lizzie Lockett, <i>RCVS Chief Executive</i>
1125 – 1140	<b>“How Farm Vets Cope”: A summary of the project funded by the Sarah Brown Mental Health Research Grant (Year 1), including ‘take home’ messages and post-project activity</b> Dr Kate Lamont, <i>Senior Lecturer in Veterinary and Animal Science, Scotland’s Rural College (SRUC)</i>
1140 – 1155	<b>Experiences and impact of moral injury on UK veterinary professional wellbeing</b> Dr Victoria Williamson, <i>Research Fellow, King’s College London; University of Oxford</i>
1155 – 1210	<b>Solutions that could make a difference to the impact of racism on Black and Minority Ethnic People working and studying in the UK veterinary profession</b> Dr Navaratnam Partheeban, <i>Regional Head for Farm IVC Evidensia; Co-founder British Veterinary Ethnicity and Diversity Society</i>
1210 – 1225	<b>Autistic veterinary surgeons in the United Kingdom: workplace stressors and mental wellbeing</b> Dr Kirstie Pickles, <i>Clinical Assistant Professor in Equine Medicine, University of Nottingham</i>
1225 – 1240	<b>An online compassionate imagery intervention to improve psychological wellbeing for veterinarians: A randomised control trial</b> Dr Katherine Wakelin, <i>NHS Clinical Psychologist and Research Fellow, University of Surrey and Berkshire NHS Healthcare Foundation Trust</i> and Sarah Corthorne, <i>Postgraduate Research Student, University of Surrey and Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Trust</i>

1240 – 1330	<b>Lunch and Networking</b>
1330 – 1550	<b>Research Talks</b> <i>Session Chair: Angharad Belcher, RCVS Director of Advancement of the Professions</i>
1330 – 1345	<b>Euthanasia of animals – Association with veterinarians’ suicidal thoughts and attitudes to assisted dying in humans: A nationwide cross-sectional survey (the NORVET study)</b> Helene Seljenes Dalum, <i>Researcher, Institute for Studies of the Medical Profession, Oslo, Norway</i>
1345 – 1400	<b>How veterinary professionals are affected by companion animal euthanasia</b> Hannah Poulton, <i>BSc Veterinary Nursing Graduate, Hartpury University</i>
1400 – 1415	<b>Reducing moral stress through ethical discussion in charity veterinary hospitals</b> Dr Vanessa Ashall, <i>Senior Research Fellow, Wellcome Trust, Science and Technology Studies Unit (SATSU), University of York</i>
1415 – 1430	<b>The Vet Stressor Study: Examining the relationship between workplace stressors and career stage</b> Dr Jason Spendelow, <i>Professor of Clinical Psychology and Professional Practice</i> and Dr Rebecca Smith, <i>Lecturer in Veterinary Professional Development, Harper and Keele Vet School</i>
1430 – 1445	<b>Afternoon Break</b>
1445 – 1500	<b>Is the quality and provision of mental health support in higher education sufficient in preparing student veterinary nurses for the profession?</b> Kaitlin Murray, <i>IVC Evidensia UK</i>
1500 – 1515	<b>Final year student veterinary nurses’ future career plans: values, beliefs and anxieties</b> Suzannah Harniman, <i>Senior Lecturer and Programme Manager, Department of Veterinary Nursing, Hartpury University</i>
1515 – 1530	<b>How the COVID-19 pandemic shaped the veterinary mental well-being in Europe</b> Nancy De Briyne, <i>Executive Director</i> , and Wiebke Jansen, <i>Policy Officer, Federation of Veterinarians of Europe</i>
1530 – 1550	<b>Mind Matters Initiative talk and Sarah Brown Award</b> Angharad Belcher, <i>RCVS Director for Advancement of the Professions</i>
1550 – 1600	<b>Closing remarks</b> Dr Kate Richards
1600	<b>Close</b>

# CHAIRS & PLENARY SPEAKERS

## **Lizzie Lockett, RCVS Chief Executive**

Lizzie joined the RCVS in February 2005 as Head of Communications, and later became Director of Strategic Communications. In these roles, 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), and she was appointed RCVS CEO in November 2017.

Lizzie also sits on the Communications and Fundraising Committee of the Mental Health Foundation.



## **Angharad Belcher, RCVS Director for Advancement for the Professions**

Angharad is the Director for Advancement of the Professions and also the MMI Director. She recognises the inter-connectedness of all areas of animal health and the different impacts that this has on veterinary professionals' wellbeing. Since joining MMI she has tried to bring the community together to increase the opportunities to discuss issues and raise awareness from menopause, climate change anxiety, grief and chronic health to name a few while ensuring that these are always viewed from an intersectional perspective, making space for lesser heard voices, and with an evidence base where possible.

She lives in the Cotswolds with her family, including three cats. Outside of work she is a member the British Bee Veterinary Association. Her hobbies including gardening, reading and spending time in nature.



## **Dr Kate Richards, Chair of RCVS Mind Matters Initiative**

Kate is the Chair of the RCVS Mind Matters Initiative, member of RCVS Council and Past President. In addition, Kate chairs the Education Committee, has been selected to veterinary school accreditation panels nationally and internationally and is an RCVS representative on the UK delegation to the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe. A STEM Ambassador for many years, Kate mentors disadvantaged school students to unlock their potential to access university.

With a portfolio of non-executive directorships spanning the veterinary, agriculture and food sectors, Kate's draws on her career as a farm animal practitioner and Official Veterinarian as well as working in the pharmaceutical industry and UK Government.

Kate's interest in mental health and wellbeing is longstanding. She volunteers for VetLife and chaired the Covent Garden Dragon Hall Trust which is a charity serving the needs of local people with a specific focus on children, young people and older residents.



## **Dr Rosie Allister, RCVS MMI Symposium Organiser**

Rosie has received the British Veterinary Association Chiron Award and the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons Impact Award for work on veterinary mental health. Rosie manages Vetlife Helpline, a 24 hour support service for everyone in the UK veterinary community. Her research, based at the University of Edinburgh, looks at veterinary mental health, wellbeing at work, and veterinary suicide prevention. She has written and spoken extensively about veterinary mental health in the UK and internationally. She has volunteered with Samaritans for 19 years and advises a number of national organisations on mental health, professional identity, suicide prevention and self harm.



## **Evidence-based care for people who have self-harmed: risk prediction, psychosocial assessments, and aftercare**

### **Dr Leah Quinlivan, University of Manchester**

Dr Quinlivan leads the self-harm research component and the patient involvement and engagement work in self-harm and suicide prevention in the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) Greater Manchester Patient Safety Research Collaboration. She is also an expert content advisor for the NHS England and NHS Improvement funded programme to improve community-based services for self-harm.



## **"How Farm Vets Cope": A summary of the project funded by the Sarah Brown Mental Health Research Grant (Year 1), including 'take home' messages and post-project activity**

### **Dr Kate Lamont, Scotland's Rural College (SRUC)**

Kate is a public health social scientist at SRUC's School of Veterinary Medicine in the Centre for Epidemiology and Planetary Health. As well as working on various veterinary-epidemiology and agri-food projects, her research interests also include mental health and wellbeing in remote, rural, and agricultural communities.



### **Research overview**

Aspects of farm animal veterinary practice can be uniquely rewarding, whilst challenges specific to the profession are not commonly recognised. Data about how farm vets cope was gathered and used to produce online materials so that other farm vets, not least new graduates far from home, might realise that they are not alone and that there are mechanisms which can help to manage some of the unique challenges of the role.

Post-project activity has included publications, workshops with vet students, and contributions to various projects, including one about factors which protect against suicide in lone workers in the West Highlands.

## **Experiences and impact of moral injury on UK veterinary professional wellbeing**

### **Dr Victoria Williamson, King's College London and University of Oxford**

Victoria Williamson is a researcher at King's College London and the University of Oxford. Her research focuses on the psychological impact of trauma exposure, including exposure to moral injury. She is currently leading the first UK feasibility study to develop and pilot a treatment for moral injury related mental health difficulties with Combat Stress.



### **Research overview**

**Background:** Veterinary professionals (VPs) are often exposed to distressing and ethically challenging events in their line of work, yet little is known about whether they may experience moral injury and the impact potentially morally injurious events (PMIEs) may have on their wellbeing. This cross-sectional study aimed to examine the association between PMIEs and the mental health outcomes of UK VPs.

**Method:** Assessments of PMIE exposure and self-report measures of common mental disorders were administered using an anonymous online questionnaire to 90 UK VPs between December 2020-May 2021.

**Results:** Exposure to PMIEs was reported by almost all VPs (89.0%), with acts of omission most frequently reported. Experiences of PMIEs were significantly associated with symptoms of PTSD ( $p < 0.01$ ) and the likelihood of meeting PTSD case criteria was greatest in those VPs exposed to betrayal and perpetration events. However, there was no significant association found between PMIE exposure and alcohol misuse or CMD ( $p > 0.05$ ).

**Conclusions:** This study provides some of the first evidence that experiences of moral injury are significantly associated with adverse mental health outcomes in UK VPs. Future work is needed to design effective pathways for prevention and intervention for VPs exposed to highly challenging events.



# CHAIRS & PLENARY SPEAKERS

**Solutions that could make a difference to the impact of racism on Black and Minority Ethnic People working and studying in the UK Veterinary Profession**

**Dr Navaratnam Partheeban,**  
**British Veterinary Ethnicity and Diversity Society**

Navaratnam Partheeban is farm animal veterinary surgeon. Previous roles include working in farm animal clinical practice, university higher education, the pharmaceutical sector and in the global animal health industry. Partheeban is a co-founder of the British Veterinary Ethnicity and Diversity Society (BVEDS). His Nuffield Farming study 2021 explored "Encouraging and Supporting Black and People of Colour in Agriculture". As a current Director of the Oxford Farming Conference, he is leading the McDonalds OFC Scholars Programme and running the Breaking Barriers Scholarship. He has previously been a trustee of The Country Trust and St Werburghs City Farm. Partheeban recently received an OBE for services to inclusion.



## Research overview

There has been very limited research investigating racism in the veterinary profession, and no research to date has examined the impact of racism among the victims in the veterinary sector. Our current research addresses this gap, and investigates the effect that racism has on individuals from BAME backgrounds by analysing open-text questionnaire data using thematic analysis.

This session will build on the last symposium by looking at the data again, but we will share the solutions that were suggested as part of the research by the participants. We hope that this research will empower others to work on this issue and that the findings will help to direct effective and positive action to break down barriers and create a fair and inclusive culture in the veterinary sector for all, regardless of race or ethnicity.

**Autistic veterinary surgeons in the United Kingdom: Workplace stressors and mental wellbeing**

**Dr Kirstie Pickles,**  
**University of Nottingham**

Kirstie is an equine medicine diplomate, with a background in both clinical practice and academia, as well as a Mental Health First Aid England Instructor. She is passionate about teaching, equine medicine, neurodiversity awareness and wellbeing in the veterinary profession. She received a late diagnosis of autism at 47 following one of her children being diagnosed. In 2021 Kirstie and her colleagues at Nottingham received the MMI Sarah Brown mental health research award to investigate workplace stressors of autistic veterinary surgeons. Kirstie is a keen advocate for neurodiversity awareness and acts as an Expert by Experience for Health Education England training of mental health professionals.



## Research overview

Poor mental wellbeing has been documented in both veterinary surgeons and autistic adults. As such, autistic veterinary surgeons may be at particular risk for poor mental wellbeing. The experiences of 93 UK autistic veterinary surgeons' psychosocial work environment were examined using an online survey of mental wellbeing (Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale [WEMWBS]), generic psychosocial work environment quality (Health and Safety Executive Management Standards Indicator Tool [MSIT]), and veterinary-specific job stressors.

The mean WEMWBS score was 39, with 57% of respondents reporting probable depression (score of  $\leq 40$ ). All seven MSIT psychosocial work environment domains significantly correlated with mental wellbeing. Generic psychosocial working conditions accounted for 46% of the variance in mental wellbeing, with job control and role clarity (both  $\beta = 0.28$ ) showing the strongest associations with mental wellbeing ( $p < 0.05$ ). Veterinary-specific job stressors made a small additional contribution (4%) to explaining mental wellbeing over and above that explained by generic stressors. Psychosocial work environment modification may represent an effective means by which to support the mental wellbeing of autistic veterinary surgeons.

**An online compassionate imagery intervention to improve psychological wellbeing for veterinarians: A randomised control trial.**

**Dr Katherine Wakelin,**  
**University of Surrey and Berkshire NHS Healthcare Foundation Trust**

After qualifying from the University of Surrey's Clinical Doctorate Programme in 2021, I now work as a Clinical Psychologist in an NHS trauma service. I am trained to work with a wide range of mental health difficulties and am particularly passionate about Compassion Focused Therapy for high levels of shame and self-criticism. Alongside my NHS role I work part time as a Research Fellow at the University of Surrey.



**Sarah Corthorne,**  
**University of Surrey and Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Trust**

I am a Trainee Clinical Psychologist from the University of Surrey. This means I work part time in the NHS rotating through different mental health placements and part time in research/teaching at the university. At the university I am supervised by Dr Katherine Wakelin and Dr Chrissie Jones to help conduct a randomised control trial, to explore the effectiveness of an online compassionate imagery course for improving the mental wellbeing of vets.



## Research overview

Veterinarians report high levels of psychological distress and self-criticism. However, there is minimal research investigating psychological interventions for veterinarians. Evidence suggests that compassion-focused therapy (CFT) is effective at reducing distress in those with high self-criticism. Wakelin et al. (2022) found an online CFT intervention to be feasible and acceptable amongst veterinarians. Therefore this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of Wakelin et al.s (2022) two-week online compassionate imagery intervention for veterinarians. This presentation will summarise the study progress and findings to date. Approximately 120 veterinarians will have been recruited and randomly allocated to the intervention group or treatment as usual. Participants in the intervention group will watch one 10-minute video per day for 14 days. Participants will complete six measures for a range of psychological outcomes (self-criticism/self-reassurance, self-compassion, resilience, perfectionism, fears of compassion and work-related rumination) across four time points (baseline, two weeks post-intervention, four weeks post-intervention and eight weeks post-intervention). Statistical analysis will be conducted using repeated measures ANOVAs, looking at within-between interactions. If the efficacy of this intervention is established, it will provide a rationale for developing and offering effective compassion-based interventions to this population more widely. ●



# RESEARCH TALKS

## Euthanasia of animals – Association with veterinarians’ suicidal thoughts and attitudes to assisted dying in humans: A nationwide cross-sectional survey (the NORVET study)

**Helene Seljenes Dalum, Researcher, Institute of Basic Medical Science, Oslo, Norway**

Helene is a veterinarian from Norway. She graduated in 2010, and has been working in small animal practice, production animal practice and in public administration. Helene has a strong personal interest in mental health and started as a PhD candidate on the #NORVETproject in 2020, together with supervisors at the University of Oslo, Department of Behavioural Medicine. She publicly defended her thesis, ‘Suicidal thoughts, animal euthanasia and help-seeking among veterinarians in Norway – a nationwide and cross-sectional survey (The NORVET study)’ in June 2023.

### Research overview

**Background:** Veterinarians have an increased suicide risk. Euthanasing animals may influence both veterinarians’ views on assisted dying in humans and their suicide risk.

**Aims, hypothesis, research questions:** The aim of this paper was threefold: We investigated (I) attitudes towards assisted dying, (II) whether the field of work and the frequency of euthanasing animals were associated with positive attitudes towards human euthanasia, and (III) whether frequently euthanasing animals was associated with serious suicidal thoughts.

**Methods:** Nationwide, cross-sectional survey among veterinarians (75 % response rate). We used logistic regression and calculated odds ratios for both positive attitudes towards human euthanasia and serious suicidal thoughts. Analyses were adjusted for socio-demographic and work-related factors.

**Results:** Veterinarians’ attitudes toward assisted dying in humans is comparable to that of the general population. The frequency of animal euthanasia was not associated with positive attitudes towards euthanasia in humans. However, companion animal veterinarians were more likely to have positive attitudes towards euthanasia in humans. Moreover, euthanising animals five times or more a week was associated with serious suicidal thoughts.

**Conclusions:** Our findings suggest that euthanasing animals may be an occupational stressor. This should be further investigated, especially with respect to it potentially contributing to suicide risk.

## How veterinary professionals are affected by companion animal euthanasia

**Hannah Poulton, BSc Veterinary Nursing Graduate, Hartpury University**

Hannah Poulton is a veterinary nurse working in a small animal practice in the West Midlands. She has a BSc (Hons) in Veterinary Nursing from Hartpury University. She has developed a keen interest in bereavement support for clients and staff and completed this study as the dissertation for her degree.

### Research overview

Being able to provide euthanasia is seen as a privilege amongst the veterinary profession. With a suicide rate higher than the national average, it is important to evaluate the effects of euthanasia on veterinary professionals. To understand whether this potential moral stressor is a cause for a decline in mental health, a qualitative study was completed. The aim was to investigate how veterinary professionals (veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses) in the UK are affected by companion animal euthanasia. The objectives were to identify what effects euthanasia is perceived to have on the veterinary professional, to identify whether the circumstances of euthanasia affect the response of the veterinary professional, to identify whether job role affects the response of the veterinary professional and to investigate how veterinary staff feel about support provided for coping with euthanasia in practice.

Six interviews were conducted with veterinary nurses and veterinary surgeons, with open questions and a scenario-based discussion, where participants ranked scenarios according to the effect that each would have on them. Data were analysed thematically. Results found that the circumstances surrounding the euthanasia affect the veterinary professional in different ways. Participants felt that some circumstances were ‘justified’, and some were ‘unjustified’. Moreover, job role affects the way the veterinary professional views the euthanasia. Veterinary surgeons tended to have a more clinical view on the euthanasia, understanding why it is taking place for the benefit of the patient. Veterinary nurses had a more emotional approach, acting as support for the client, the patient, and the veterinary surgeon, which was also reported as the approach of non-clinical staff by those interviewed. Euthanasia is a potential catalyst for a decline in the mental health of veterinary professionals. The study suggests that more mental health support may be needed to help veterinary professionals to cope with this procedure, such as targeted continuing professional development or interventions at early stages in veterinary education.

## Reducing moral stress through ethical discussion in charity veterinary hospitals

**Dr Vanessa Ashall, Senior Research Fellow, Wellcome Trust; Science and Technology Studies Unit (SATSU); University of York**

Vanessa qualified as a vet in 2000 and worked first in mixed then companion animal practice before discovering ethics through her role as Named Veterinary Surgeon at an animal research facility. She then joined the newly formed Pet Blood Bank UK as their ethics and welfare advisor before becoming a Wellcome Trust Senior Research Fellow in ethics and society at the University of Nottingham, where she was awarded a PhD in empirical veterinary ethics. She is a European Veterinary Specialist in Animal Welfare Science, Ethics and Law, co-director of the Science and Technology Studies Unit (SATSU), University of York and Chair of the Animal Welfare Science, Ethics and Law Veterinary Association (AWSELVA).

### Research overview

In light of increasing concerns over moral stress as a cause of poor mental health in the veterinary profession, it has recently been suggested that increased ethical discussion may improve staff welfare in charity veterinary hospitals. This study aims to examine experiences of moral stress in charity veterinary practice and to qualitatively evaluate the role of ethical discussion in reducing veterinary moral stress. The study hypothesises that regular ethical discussion within charity veterinary hospitals can improve veterinary team wellbeing. The study’s qualitative empirical approach consists of a thematic data analysis of 9 focus groups and 15 individual interviews with veterinary team members from three UK charity hospitals. Study results show that moral stress is an everyday experience which may be cumulative, and which can interact with other forms of stress. Distinct practical and relational barriers to ethical action are identified and proposed as contributors to moral stress and different team members experience different barriers within their own roles. The potential impact of moral stress on team members’ quality of life and mental health are highlighted. A discussion of the results shows that regular facilitated ethical group discussion may reduce moral stress in the hospital setting, particularly through familiarization with others’ roles and ethical perspectives and through supporting one another’s ethical decision making. The study concludes that moral stress is an important and poorly understood problem in charity veterinary practice and that further development of regular facilitated ethical group discussion may have considerable mental health benefits for team members.

## The Vet Stressor Study: Examining the relationship between workplace stressors and career stage

**Prof. Jason Spendelow, Professor of Clinical Psychology and Professional Practice, Harper and Keele Vet School**

Jason is a Clinical Psychologist and Professor at Harper and Keele Vet School. His interests lie in workplace performance and wellbeing. Following several years of clinical practice, he began working with professionals across various industries helping people apply psychological skills in the workplace. He joined the Harper and Keele Vet School in 2021 leading the ‘Performance and Wellbeing’ strategic theme. He has since been involved in research and the development of psychological skills training for vet professionals.

**Dr Rebecca Smith, Lecturer in Veterinary Professional Development, Harper and Keele Vet School**

Rebecca graduated from the University of Glasgow in 2014, after which she began working as a small animal general practitioner. In 2020 she took a part time role in academia, alongside clinical work and is currently working at the Harper and Keele Veterinary School as a lecturer in veterinary professional development.

### Research overview

**Background:** Scientific literature reports elevated psychological distress in the vet professions. However, less is known about individual and environmental factors affecting well-being throughout a person’s career.

**Objective:** This study was undertaken to determine the most severe workplace stressors for veterinary professionals at various career stages.

**Research Question:** How do the type and severity of workplace stressors differ based on experience level?

**Method:** A cross-sectional quantitative design was used to gather ratings on 93 workplace stressors from students and qualified veterinary professionals. Demographic and work characteristic variables were also collected.

**Results:** Data from 658 participants identified the most significant stressors as ‘Client & Animal Care Challenges’, ‘Workload & Time Pressures’, and ‘Performance Anxiety & Expectations’. The most severe stressors differed in type across experience levels. However, some stressors were prominent across the career trajectory (eg staff shortages). Compared

# RESEARCH TALKS



to highly-experience workers, early-career professionals experienced relatively higher distress across multiple stressors (eg fear of mistakes).

**Discussion:** These findings clarify the nature and severity of stressors throughout a professional's career, emphasising the importance of tailoring support and training to a professional's developmental stage.

**Conclusion:** This study's data can inform the development of targeted stressor management training at both individual and organisational levels.

## Is the quality and provision of mental health support in higher education sufficient in preparing student veterinary nurses for the profession?

### Kaitlin Michelle Murray, IVC Evidensia UK

Kaitlin entered the veterinary industry in 2018 when she started her journey to becoming a Registered Veterinary Nurse at Harper Adams University. She has now been a qualified veterinary nurse for over a year, having graduated in September 2022. Kaitlin is currently working in a first-opinion small animal practice based in Shropshire. She is a strong believer in 'life is short' so, outside of work, she loves to travel the world and create as many new experiences for herself as she can.

#### Research overview

**Background:** Mental health (MH) within the veterinary nursing profession is often overlooked despite the known prevalence of poor MH within the wider profession. Evidence suggests that MH is a contributing factor to the poor retention of Registered Veterinary Nurses (RVN) seen each year, however, little evidence suggests what can be done to prevent this.

#### Aims:

1. Determine the quality of MH support student veterinary nurses (SVNs) are receiving during higher education (HE).
2. Identify areas of MH support that may require improvement.
3. Propose potential ways to enhance the MH support system in HE.

**Hypothesis:** The quality and provision of MH support in HE is insufficient in preparing SVNs for the profession.

**Method:** A mixed-methods approach was used. Participants were recruited by selective sampling for interviews. Audio

recordings were gathered for the purpose of transcription to compare data sets and identify reoccurring themes. A questionnaire was also distributed online.

**Results:** 85.4% of participants stated they had been subjected to mental health fluctuations (MHF) at some point during their careers. All interview participants identified that a lack of coping strategies provided during university somewhat contributed to the outcome of their MH. 46.34% of participants who reported having experienced MHF also felt their university did not appropriately prepare them for their role.

**Conclusion:** MHF were found to be a common issue among RVNs with contributing factors being multifactorial. Although methods of alternative MH support were not trialled in this study, suggestions were made to potentially challenge the way HE courses can provide this support in the future.

## Final year student veterinary nurses' future career plans: values, beliefs and anxieties

### Suzannah Harniman, Senior Lecturer and Programme Manager, Department of Veterinary Nursing, Hartpury University

Suzannah Harniman is a Registered Equine Veterinary Nurse and Senior Lecturer in the Veterinary Nursing Department at Hartpury University. She manages the BSc (hons) Veterinary Nursing and BSc (hons) Equine Veterinary Nursing programmes at Hartpury and teaches across a range of veterinary nursing modules. While completing her MA in Education, Suzannah developed an interest in qualitative social science research and has since focused her research on the experiences student veterinary nurses have at university.

#### Research overview

To reduce the future attrition of Registered Veterinary Nurses (RVNs) from clinical practice, it is necessary for veterinary nurse (VN) graduates to be motivated to seek employment in clinical roles and for them to have the desire to have long-term careers as RVNs.

The purpose of this research was to utilise the Subjective Task Values (STV) of the Situated Expectancy-Value Theory (SEVT) to identify the values and beliefs that motivated final-year VN students to make their future career plans.

The research question that this project addressed was, 'How

do the values and beliefs of final year students on a BSc (hons) VN programme, impact their desire to seek future employment in the VN industry?'

The research took a qualitative approach via online semi-structured interviews with 10 final-year student participants. The data were analysed using a six-step method of thematic analysis. The STVs of the SEVT were then used as a framework for interpreting the findings.

The participants had all considered alternative careers and held the belief that they were unlikely to have long-term VN careers. The participants' beliefs about career longevity could mostly be attributed a particular STV known as the perceived cost. The participants also associated high levels of intrinsic STV with key aspects of the VN job role.

It is suggested that universities could provide students with additional wellbeing support to foster a culture of openness, to empower SVNs to share their concerns and receive support to help them to maintain the motivation they require to engage in long-term clinical careers.

## How the COVID-19 pandemic shaped the veterinary mental well-being in Europe

### Nancy De Briyne, Executive Director, Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE)

Nancy De Briyne graduated as a veterinary surgeon in 1996. Having studied veterinary medicine in Ghent (Belgium), she then went on to work as a veterinary practitioner in Belgium and the UK until 2000. Since then, she has worked for the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) where she is now an Executive Director. Her overall role within FVE is to follow the strategy, oversee operations, and ensure the organisation's goals and objectives are achieved. More specifically, she closely follows all dossiers in relation to veterinary medicines, antimicrobial resistance (AMR), animal welfare, and the status of the veterinary profession. FVE has done three extensive surveys of the veterinary profession (in 2015, 2018, and 2022), which include looking at veterinary mental wellbeing and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI).

### Wiebke Jansen, Policy Officer, Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE)

Wiebke received her veterinary degree from the University of Veterinary Medicine in Hannover (Germany) in 2010. After 10 years in research projects focusing on the detection and characterisation of food-borne zoonotic pathogens and antimicrobial resistance in

emerging food-borne pathogens, she completed her Ph.D. and became an EBVS specialist in Veterinary Public Health in 2017. Before joining the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe in 2021, she managed the national Q fever surveillance program at the Belgian National Reference Laboratory for neglected zoonotic diseases and was their Animal Welfare Officer. At FVE, she works as Veterinary Policy on European Veterinary Public Health Policies, focusing on animal health, animal welfare, and the mental well-being of veterinarians, which led to several publications on the use of antibiotics and alternatives, and diversity, equity, and inclusiveness in the veterinary profession.

#### Research overview

**Background:** While acknowledging the abundantly positive aspects of work within the different domains of the veterinary profession, the challenging socioeconomic and cultural working climate has been recognised as a source of mental well-being issues. In recent years, several studies reported that veterinary MWB has been under increasing pressure due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

**Objectives and hypothesis:** The present study investigated data from before and after the pandemic with respect to whether veterinarians had to leave work for more than two weeks continuously due to depression, burn-out, exhaustion, or compassion fatigue across Europe.

**Methods:** The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe ran an electronic, anonymous, and voluntary survey for European veterinarians between (i) November 2018 and March 2019 and (ii) November 2022 and March 2023. The questionnaire was offered in all official languages of the participating countries.

**Results:** On the European level, a slight decrease was observed. Between 2018/2019, 26% of participants said they had to take off two weeks due to mental welfare issues in the last three years, vs. 23% in 2022/2023, although some countries like Latvia (28%), Italy (15%) and Romania (14%) reported an increase. There was a slight decrease in females (26%) taking breaks in 2022/2023 compared with 29.7% in 2018/2019.

**Discussion and conclusion:** Attention to veterinary MWB and DEI has increased substantially in the last decade, followed by the development of support programmes by many veterinary organisations, companies, and faculties. These developments, together with the shared experience of intense stress during the pandemic, could have lowered the need to take mental health breaks for European veterinarians. ●



# SARAH BROWN RESEARCH GRANT

## Presentation of the Sarah Brown Mental Health Research Grant

The Sarah Brown Mental Health Research Grant was founded in 2019 in memory of RCVS Council member Sarah Brown, who passed away in 2017. Sarah was a strong mental health and wellbeing advocate with a particular passion for ensuring that those working in the veterinary professions were confident, happy, resilient and well supported.

Since 2019, the £20,000 grant has been awarded on a yearly basis.

Over the past five years, projects have funded research into several areas including:

- the mental health impacts of racism;
- moral injury;
- farm veterinarian mental health;
- an investigation into workplace stressors for autistic veterinarians; and
- the effectiveness of online compassionate imagery intervention.

MMI are pleased to announce that this year's grant has been awarded to Dr Faye Didymus and Dr Jackie Hargreaves from Leeds Beckett University whose research project aims to address a potential lack of understanding surrounding the importance of mental health education in the learning paths of student veterinary nurses.

This will be achieved by carrying out a scoping review of mental health education during student veterinary nursing curricula. The review will be supplemented by interviews with tutors,

veterinary nurse students and qualified veterinary nurses to understand their experiences of and levels of exposure to mental health education. The research will culminate in a set of evidence-based recommendations for how mental health education for student veterinary nurses could be enhanced.

### **Dr Faye Didymus, Reader in Sport and Performance Psychology, Leeds Beckett University.**

Faye is a reader in sport and performance psychology within the Carnegie School of Sport at Leeds Beckett University. Faye's fundamental and applied research focuses on the ways that psychological stress and well-being inhibit and facilitate performance in sport and other high pressure roles such as surgeons and general practitioners. Faye is a fellow of the Higher Education Academy, a British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences Accredited Sport and Exercise Scientist, a Science Council Chartered Scientist, and a member of the Journal of Sport Psychology in Action and the International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology editorial boards.

### **Dr Jackie Hargreaves, Senior Lecturer in Sport and Exercise Psychology, Leeds Beckett University.**

Jackie is a senior lecturer of exercise and health psychology within the Carnegie School of Sport at Leeds Beckett University. Alongside teaching, Jackie undertakes research exploring how physical activity impacts on the mental health of a variety of different populations. Recently, Jackie has been investigating how mental health principles can be embedded into the curriculum design of an undergraduate course in Health and Exercise Science. Jackie is a HCPC registered Health Psychologist, a fellow of the Higher Education Academy and a British Psychological Society Chartered Psychologist. ●

# EVALUATION & STRATEGY

Back in May 2023, MMI released two key publications – an **Evaluation Report** outlining our progress and impact since our inception almost a decade ago, and our new **Five-Year Strategy** announcing the project's plans and future direction.

## **The Mind Matters Evaluation – The story so far...**

Ambitious in its scope, MMI has brought together stakeholders and representatives from across the range of the professions to collaborate in its three main workstreams: Prevent, Protect and Support. As MMI moves towards its next phase, the evaluation report looks at some of the key projects established under the three workstreams, showing how the project's confidence, ambition and reach has grown over time.

The report also includes case studies outlining the key challenges and problems that MMI has sought to address, what was done to address them, the impact made, and how lessons learned from each of those projects will be used to shape the future of MMI. ●

To access the Mind Matters Evaluation Report, visit [vetmindmatters.org/resources/mind-matters-initiative-the-story-so-far](https://vetmindmatters.org/resources/mind-matters-initiative-the-story-so-far) or scan the QR code below.



## **The Mind Matters Five-Year Strategy**

The second publication, the Mind Matters Five-Year Strategy, was developed alongside the evaluation, and presents an overview of MMI's plans for the next five years, taking stock of MMI's achievements so far, and looking ahead to new areas of focus that build on current successes while learning from the challenges faced in previous years. The strategy summarises key objectives, and how these fit into the existing MMI prevent, protect and support workstreams.

While we can take a moment to pause and look back over more than eight years of success, impact and learning through the Mind Matters Initiative, we are more than aware that there is always more work that the project can do. We can always reach more people, cover more ground, impart more information, but we can only do this well if we have a sense of overall purpose, combined with a clear plan on how we will deliver for the veterinary professions.

The strategy is an ambitious document that takes into account the evolving - and widening - conversations around mental health, research and development around prevention and treatment, and our own learning earned through experience. ●

To access the Mind Matters Five-Year Strategy, visit [vetmindmatters.org/resources/the-rcvs-mind-matters-initiative-the-next-5-years](https://vetmindmatters.org/resources/the-rcvs-mind-matters-initiative-the-next-5-years) or scan the QR code below.





# MIND MATTERS INITIATIVE

# COMMUNITY RESOURCES

**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 professions seriously - a sentiment which was reflected by an initial five-year, £1m commitment from the RCVS. During 2018, RCVS Council agreed 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.

**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.

**For further information please visit our Mind Matters Initiative webpage at [vetmindmatters.org](https://vetmindmatters.org) or use the QR code below.**



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](https://vetlife.org.uk)

With thanks to **Vetlife**, **RABI**, and **FCN** for joining us today, please visit their stands for information.

**vetlife**  
Support for the  
veterinary community

If you need confidential emotional support please contact **Vetlife 0303 040 2551** or email anonymously via [www.vetlife.org.uk](https://www.vetlife.org.uk)



**The Farming Community Network is a voluntary organisation and Charity that supports farmers and farming families through difficult times.**

**RABI**  
helping farming people

**RABI provides practical, financial and emotional support services for farming people, directly through our regionally based team and via partnerships with specialist providers. For everyone in the farming community, there's always expert help on hand for however long it's needed. RABI has been helping farming people for over 160 years and understands the challenges faced by everyone in farming. At the heart of farming, there's always help, there's always hope, there's always RABI.**

Freephone helpline: **0800 188 4444** or you can send an email to [help@rabi.org.uk](mailto:help@rabi.org.uk)

[rabi.org.uk](https://rabi.org.uk)

# NOTES



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mind matters

The Mind Matters Initiative is run by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons  
[www.vetmindmatters.org](http://www.vetmindmatters.org)  
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