



# JAVS

The Journal of the Association of  
Veterinary Students

SPRING 2015

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## AVS CONTACTS

### President, Alex McGhee

avspresident@gmail.com

### Senior Vice President, Nic Wojciechowski

avsseniorvicepresident@gmail.com

### Junior Vice President, Helena Diffey

hdiffey1@rvc.ac.uk

### Secretary, Will Bayton

svywb@nottingham.ac.uk

### Treasurer, Jenny Brazier

jbrazier@rvc.ac.uk

### Welfare, Fliss Barber

avs.welfare@gmail.com

### IVSA Rep, Vicky Carliell

presidentivsauk@gmail.com

### JAVS Editor, Jordan Sinclair

javseditor@hotmail.com

### Marketing Rep, Rupert Sheppard

rs12729@mybristol.ac.uk

### Web Editor, James Blaydon

jbladon@student.liv.ac.uk

## BRISTOL

Tom Cantor, Bristol Senior: tc1964@mybristol.ac.uk

Hannah Mason, Bristol Junior: hm12587@mybristol.ac.uk

## CAMBRIDGE

Eleanor Myerscough, Cambridge Senior:

eleanor.myerscough@gmail.com

Hannah Clifford, Cambridge Junior: hfc34@cam.ac.uk

## DUBLIN

Amy Fitzgerald, Dublin Senior: amyfitz@mac.com

Aine Gilmour, Dublin Junior:

aine.gilmour@ucdconnect.ie

## EDINBURGH

Lisa Main, Edinburgh Senior: sl104272@sms.ed.ac.uk

Maria Mylne, Edinburgh Junior:

maria.mylne@gmail.com

## GLASGOW

Alex Andryzak, Glasgow Senior:

1103112a@student.gla.ac.uk

Danielle MacGill, Glasgow Junior:

1105350m@student.gla.ac.uk

## LIVERPOOL

Sarah Boland, Liverpool Senior: hlsbolan@liv.ac.uk

## LONDON

Georgie Lethbridge, London Senior:

glethbridge1@rvc.ac.uk

Jess Timmins, London Junior: jtimmings3@rvc.ac.uk

## NOTTINGHAM

Jonathan Mayer, Nottingham Senior:

svyjm2@nottingham.ac.uk

Rosie Howton, Nottingham Junior:

svyrh1@nottingham.ac.uk

# Represent, support, engage

By Jordan Sinclair, JAVS Editor

Having now been a member of the AVS committee for a full year, I have gained an insight to the workings of veterinary education and the profession as a whole. I have also realised how much capacity AVS has to reach out to students and implement changes, in order to maximise the veterinary student experience. During the year, in addition to the annual congress and the infamous AVS Sports Weekend, the committee has accomplished much more, some of which is illustrated in the 'AVS' section of this edition.



As part of the marketing subcommittee, our achievements this year have been particularly rewarding. The new website and the committee's push on social media have encouraged members to engage with AVS more than ever before.

A direct example of this is the RCVS consultation on the use of the courtesy title of 'Dr'. While members of the BVA Members' Services Group were indifferent to or against the proposal, the AVS Junior Vice-President, who was present at the meeting, was able to respond with evidence of the student opinion. AVS posted about the consultation on the website, Facebook and Twitter. The initial post was seen by over 22,000 people, 1719 of whom followed the link to the RCVS website. AVS then carried out a quick poll, in which 290 people voted, and 281 of these were pro using the title.

Hence, there was an overwhelmingly positive reaction to the consultation and the use of social media has widened the ability of AVS to engage with its members and accurately represent the veterinary student body.

There is so much potential for our long-term aims, too, such as the production of an AVS app, consultations on EMS provision and involvement in the Vet Futures project run by both the BVA and the RCVS.

The AVS marketing subcommittee came up with a tagline for AVS: represent, support, engage. After reviewing all we have done in the past year, this accurately and concisely sums up what AVS stands for.

*Jordan*

e-mail: javseditor@hotmail.com

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# New AVS committee members confirmed

By the AVS Committee

The AVS is pleased to announce that the following people have secured places on the AVS committee;

**Junior Vice-President,  
Hannah Mason**  
**Secretary, Joon Park**  
**Treasurer, Gareth Jones**  
**Welfare Representative,  
Abbie Dalton**

There was a particularly strong field of candidates this year, reflected in close results for a number of positions. Over 700 students voted in the elections from across the UK and Ireland. We would like to thank everybody who was involved in the elections for their participation and, in particular, the outstanding group of candidates who put themselves forward for nomination. AVS offers a warm welcome to our new committee members who began their roles at the handover meeting held at the BVA headquarters in London in March.

## **Stun before slaughter e-petition reaches target**

On January 29, the BVA's e-petition to end non-stun slaughter surpassed the 100,000 signature mark required to be considered for parliamentary debate. AVS supported the initiation of the campaign when the reality of non-stun slaughter came into the public eye last March following the ban of slaughter without stunning in Denmark. AVS has since continued to support and promote the e-petition online, resulting in a number of those signatures coming from veterinary students.

## **AVS announces policy regarding increases in the number of veterinary students**

The opening of a new veterinary school at the University of Surrey,



along with an increase in the numbers of students being accepted into existing veterinary schools, has sparked intense debate within the profession regarding the increasing number of veterinary graduates. AVS remains committed to representing the views of its members and is actively engaging with the BVA and other parties to discuss the issue.

In light of this, AVS has released the following policy statement following extensive consultation between representatives sitting on its student elected committee.

### **AVS Workforce Policy**

'The Association of Veterinary Students has concerns over the impact of rising numbers of veterinary students at both new and existing veterinary schools for the future of the profession.

'Equally, we recognise that AVS represents students at new vet schools and as a result must also protect their best interests.

### **(a) Education**

'We are aware of the current strain on existing clinicians and academic staff, and are concerned that the addition of new veterinary schools will further dilute the available academic talent.

'We would encourage the RCVS to uphold the high standards of veterinary education in the UK. In addition, we feel further steps could be taken to proactively investigate and quantify the future availability of EMS and academic staff.

### **(b) EMS**

'Increased student numbers will put further pressures on the availability of clinical EMS, which plays a vital role in the development of competent clinicians.

'New vet schools specifically have a large impact in this area. Removing available placements from an area using "The partner practice model", such as that adopted by Nottingham and Surrey vet schools, will put a specific pressure on local veterinary students due to the financial implica-

tion of having to travel further to placements.

### (c) Jobs

We recognise the concerns of our members that the increase in number of veterinary graduates will impact the availability of jobs in clinical practice. We appreciate that a university degree in other subjects does not guarantee employment.

There are, however, specific issues with the veterinary course with regards to length and cost. A worsening of graduate prospects may also deter high-quality students from applying for the veterinary degree.

'It has been suggested that EU veterinary surgeons are filling a shortfall in vet graduate positions due to the relative numbers registering from the UK and overseas. There is,

however, a lack of understanding in the length or areas of practice that overseas graduates decide to enter. In addition, the assumption that UK graduates would be preferable to overseas graduates is not acceptable.

'The RCVS should also make information available to employers about the accreditation of veterinary schools in the EU.'

## Web power

By James Bladon, AVS Web Editor (4th Year, Liverpool)

**As it's coming to the end of my first year as AVS web editor, I thought I'd share a few of my thoughts since taking on the role and describe some of the projects the marketing team has been working on.**

At AVS congress last year, Marc Abraham gave a talk on Pup Aid, the campaign he set up to try to end puppy farming in the UK. At the time, he was mustering support for a petition to secure a debate in the House of Commons. The magic number needed was 100,000 signatures. With the help of Twitter and a few key personalities such as Brian May and Ricky Gervais, the target was met, and on September 4, 2014, a debate on the regulation of the sale of puppies and kittens in the UK was held. This represents an important first step in securing a change in law, and was made possible through the power of the internet and, in particular, social media.

It is exactly the same route pursued by the BVA in relation to its 'stun before slaughter' campaign. The BVA's campaign reached the 100,000 target well before the year deadline.



While securing a debate in the House of Commons is no quick route to changing the law, it is an invaluable step in the right direction. In this regard I would urge everyone to back such campaigns and get sharing, explaining to others why, as vet students, we support important issues.

The effect of the internet and social media is reflected in the news every day. From the 'Arab Spring' to the more recent Sony hack saga and the use of Twitter by Islamic State, it has a pervasive influence in the world. It's a power that I've been trying to harness for the AVS and, I am pleased to say,

we have had a great deal of success. The new website has had over 7600 visitors, and our Facebook page has gained over 1200 new likes.

One of our most recent posts about vet students backing the use of the title 'Dr' for RCVS registered vets reached over 30,000 people. While this is small fry in the world of social media, for AVS it is a leap in the right direction, and getting even more engagement from students is going to be at the top of the agenda for this year, building on the solid foundations of 2014/2015.

But what I'd give for a Stephen Fry retweet . . .

# Vet Futures – our future

By Alex McGhee, Senior Vice-President (3rd Year, Bristol)

**As AVS president, I found myself fairly regularly filling the role of ‘least qualified person in the room’. One such meeting was the first consultative group for the Vet Futures project, which is a joint initiative by the RCVS and the BVA.**

This project is something of a milestone for the veterinary profession. Firstly, the BVA and the RCVS, as representative and regulator, respectively – don’t always find themselves in agreement, but this project illustrates an unparalleled level of cooperation. Secondly, the project constitutes the profession taking an in-depth look at the future – something we’re not always good at.

The meeting itself generated some good discussion, but for me the most interesting thing was (and I can’t believe I am writing this) a literature review. Generally, I’m no great fan of such reviews, but this one looked at the current state and possible future of the profession. If you’re considering entering the veterinary profession you should read it (<http://vetfutures.org.uk/resource/vet-futures-literature-review/>)

The paper broke down the drivers for change into six sections. What made it interesting was that, while we all have our own theories and prejudices, this proved some of them and disproved others.

The sections are: demographic changes; economic forces; an increasingly competitive market; client behaviour; food supply and global imperatives; and mental wellbeing.

The full document is available online, but I’ve tried to pick out some of the interesting points made here.

The changing gender balance of the profession is no secret, but what this will mean is rather more interesting. The rise in part-time working is blamed on this shifting balance but,

interestingly, part-time work among men has also increased markedly. Maybe this indicates a move away from the traditional all-consuming job to a healthier work/life balance. It’s also noted that women are less likely to be sole principal, director or partner and more likely to be working as an assistant employee. It is argued that this is part of a wider reluctance by women to take on leadership roles. On a personal level, I find the soul-searching among the profession regarding women in leadership is rather patronising. Within the current generation of veterinary students there appears to be no lack of willingness or leadership ability among women. What is more important is the lack of socioeconomic, ethnic or gender diversity among veterinary graduates.

Economics are split into supply and demand. The supply of veterinary graduates in the UK, with growing numbers of graduates from UK schools and free movement from the EU, is bound to increase. The paper discusses the similarities between the UK and US markets, with various levels of oversupply suggested. It doesn’t seem as though we have much control over this on either side of the Atlantic.

One area where we can do more is improving demand for veterinary services. Ideas include outreach programmes and increasing insurance uptake (currently just 15 per cent of dogs and cat owners) are suggested. It was, however, noted that insurance faces challenges with uptake plateauing and the size of claims increasing. There was also discussion about the ability of vets to communicate the value of regular check-ups. It seems that vets recognise their value far more than owners. Like it or not, clinical ability is only as useful as your ability to market it to willing customers.

With corporate practice ownership currently at 25 per cent and

growing (two in every five practices changing hands is sold to a corporate), and more online and community pharmacies selling veterinary drugs, the veterinary market will become more competitive. Those independent practices that remain will have to focus on providing personalised high-quality service tailored to the local area, rather than just competing over prices in a race to the bottom.

The paper takes exception to the terms ‘compliance’ and ‘responsible ownership’ as they represent a hierarchical approach to client relationships. It is argued that we should move away from being experts who impart instructions and instead work towards forming a partnership with owners. This, it is argued, will benefit client relationships and be a more effective method in improving animal health.

With national and international issues that would benefit from veterinary input, vets should contribute at the highest levels of government and science. As a profession, there is room for improvement in how we are represented. One area identified was a lack of evidence bases for treatment decisions. Here, we lag behind our medical colleagues, which should be motivation enough for us to make a change.

Mental health within the profession is a constant challenge. Increasing student debt, coupled with falling salaries may escalate current problems. Here again, good management is key, with regular appraisals helping guard against stress.

The future profession will undoubtedly be different. At AVS Congress, RCVS President, Stuart Reid, said ‘the future of the veterinary profession is bright, because you make it’. Vet Futures is attempting to do just that by understanding and influencing the future. That’s why it’s so interesting and important to students, as it is our profession and our future.

# Cambridge university One Health conference

By Joanne Harries (Final-Year, Cambridge)

**The second Cambridge university One Health conference was held on January 17, 2015, at Peterhouse College. The one-day conference was attended by over 100 students of medical, veterinary and global health backgrounds, all with a common interest in One Health.**

The day started with an introduction to One Health by Nigel Gibbens, UK Chief Veterinary Officer, who called on members of all disciplines to review their role in the One Health initiative.

Professor Lorenzo Savioli discussed the issue of neglected tropical diseases, drawing on his experiences from working at the World Health Organization and highlighting the important link between pharmaceutical companies and aid work in combatting neglected tropical diseases.

Peter Walsh, of Cambridge university, discussed a topical issue with a twist – protecting apes against Ebola. Mr Walsh described his work in Western Africa, performing disease modelling to predict the spread of Ebola, and his team's vaccination



projects involving wild ape populations. This rounded off a fantastic morning of talks, and was followed by lunch served in Peterhouse.

In the afternoon, Andrew Frost of the Human Animal Infections and Risk Surveillance (HAIRS) group, described the group's use of a One Health approach to improve national responses to disease outbreaks. Using specific examples, he explained how HAIRS tracked down sources of outbreaks – from notification of clinical signs to identification and tracking of pathogens, sometimes involving searches across national borders.

Nicholas Brown of Public Health England discussed the important issue of antibiotic resistance, describing the current microbial resistance situation nationally and internationally.

The early afternoon lectures were rounded off by Professor Daniel Mills, who discussed the role animals play in human mental health.

After a break for tea and biscuits, the late afternoon lectures began with Professor Matthew Allen of Cambridge Veterinary School describing translational aspects of musculoskeletal research.

The conference rounded off with Professor James Fawcett speaking about novel approaches to spinal cord repair. Professor Fawcett drew on examples of both animal and human spinal cord disease and discussed cutting-edge developments of spinal cord regeneration therapy.

After the conference, many of the delegates stayed to attend a formal dinner at Peterhouse. As the oldest Cambridge college, established in 1284, the candlelit formal dinner was a beautiful display of Cambridge tradition, with diners kept warm





by a log fire in the dining hall.

We would like to express our gratitude once again to our sponsors: the Wellcome Trust, Merial, Bayer (for Professor Savioli's talk), the Veterinary Public Health Association and Dechra, whose support made this event possible.

The next Cambridge university One Health conference will be held in 2016. For any comments or inquiries, please contact the committee at [info@onehealthcambridge.com](mailto:info@onehealthcambridge.com)



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# Gender and veterinary medicine: time to act

By Esther Nwanuforo (4th Year, Cambridge)

**The veterinary profession is increasingly dominated by women, and the profession and its members face new challenges as a result. As this is important to all vets (male and female), the Cambridge University Veterinary Society (CUVS), in collaboration with the Cambridge Department of Veterinary Medicine Athena SWAN (Scientific Women's Academic Network), hosted a 'gender and veterinary medicine' evening on January 21, 2015, to discuss the challenges.**

Dr L. Clare V. Allen gave an introductory lecture about the feminisation of the veterinary profession, and highlighted how dramatic the shift in the gender balance has been. She reported that the proportion of female new graduates has gone from 11 per cent in 1970 to 80 per cent in 2013 in the USA, with a similar trend over the same time period in the UK.

Dr Allen also spoke about her research in the USA – she has found that there seem to be gender differences in the prospective career choices of female and male vet students, with female students expressing preference for small animal practice and the 'caring' aspect of the work. Male students, however, expressed an aversion to this part of small animal practice, and found large animal practice and its 'system-based' approach more appealing.

Speakers Dr Gloria de Palma, a head vet in small animal practice, and Katharine Jennings, lead partner of a large animal practice, talked about their experiences of sexism and prejudice in their careers, and



offered some advice to male and female students on how to handle this.

The speakers put forward scenarios drawn from their personal experiences for the audience to consider and invited discussion about what the audience would do if put in that position. The evening concluded with an informal question and answer session.

With over 50 students attending, and a lot of positive feedback from them, CUVS and Athena SWAN hope to host similar events in future. Regular discussion about gender issues at veterinary colleges and society conferences will help to raise awareness about these challenges so that the profession can proactively tackle them.

Despite the increasing representation of women in the veterinary profession, sexism is still a significant problem, and there are many

gender-based issues that must be resolved. More men hold senior roles in the profession than women

(even considering that older vets tend to be male), and male vets on average earn more than female vets of equivalent seniority. Large animal practitioners are more likely to be male, and there is a higher attrition rate from the profession for women than for men.

Additionally, members of the public often expect, and prefer, to have a male vet handle their consultation.

We are all aware that the veterinary profession, and the role of the veterinarian in society, is continually evolving. There is a place in this development for gender equality in the veterinary profession to be achieved, but only if the profession as a whole, and veterinary educators in particular, take responsibility for gender-based issues and address them head-on.

**'Despite the increasing representation of women in the veterinary profession, sexism is still a significant problem, and there are many gender-based issues that must be resolved.'**

# Global health: vets' role in tackling ebola

By Helena Diffey, AVS President (Intercalating year, RVC)

**Global health is in vogue. It can be thought of as a notion, an objective (towards a world of healthy people) or a combination of research, education and practice. Overlapping with the ideas of international and public health, which also prioritise population-based preventative medicine with a multidisciplinary approach, global health places priority on improving health and achieving health equity worldwide. It has become a major component of many government foreign policies and an enormous target for philanthropy. Global health encompasses causes, determinants and solutions of health issues and, crucially, involves disciplines beyond health sciences including environmental biology, social sciences, politics and economics.**

In such an expansive subject, how does veterinary medicine, another very broad discipline, fit in? Do vets have a role to play in global health? The simple answer is, yes. Well, at least the veterinary profession knows that's the case. The huge amount of literature on the concept of 'one health' has been promoting collaboration for years and may at last be gathering momentum. One can list quite easily the topics that sit easily within the concept: emerging and re-emerging zoonotic diseases, using animals as models for non-communicable diseases such as obesity and cancer; livestock health and food security and, not least, antimicrobial resistance. However, perhaps veterinary practitioners in lower-income countries with weak and insecure health systems have another role to play . . .

The current outbreak of ebola in West Africa is the largest there has been since the discovery of the disease in 1976 and, as of January 16, 2015, there were 21,373 reported cases and 8483 deaths. This outbreak has served as a reminder of the poverty, political dysfunction, insufficient health care and desperation in West Africa, and our appalling neglect of the situation over time as part of

the international community. Many organisations, including the World Health Organization (WHO), have been heavily criticised for their inadequate response to the outbreak, stimulating extensive re-evaluation of the global health system and its governance. The main affected West African countries are within the 25 poorest countries in the world, based on World Bank GDP data. Having recently emerged from years of conflict and civil war, poverty is widespread. The link between poverty and poor health is well known and weak; under-resourced health infrastructure results not only in a high burden of disease but a severe lack of disease surveillance, prevention and control.

It is widely accepted, despite varying evidence, that the natural reservoir of the ebola virus are several species of fruit bat. The virus is also deadly to non-human primates and disease seems to occur in outbreak flurries that are bringing the species near to extinction. The risk of human infection is at its highest when animal infection rates are high, so a better understanding of bat population infections and wildlife mortality surveillance may be helpful in determining the risk

of viral emergence, providing an early-warning system for disease outbreaks. It would appear that outbreak flurries are occurring more and more often and the 'natural transfer theory' hypothesises that the social changes involving migration into the densely forested interior of central Africa to exploit the natural resources through logging, mining and oil drilling, could be to blame. Rapidly developing communities and transport infrastructure set up around these industries are changing the dynamic at the human-wildlife interface and have opened up new markets for the commercial bushmeat trade.

Anthropological studies show that there is inconsistent knowledge and understanding of the risks surrounding the hunting and consumption of bushmeat. Risk perception and the cultural practice of hunting bushmeat might be difficult to change. This is an area where local networks of animal health workers and farming organisations are trying to raise awareness of the transmission risks from wildlife among rural communities that hunt for bushmeat. This must be done with the utmost sensitivity, bearing in mind that the trust relationship with local communities is imperative. For some communities, bushmeat may provide their only source of protein, so if alternative sources of safe food were reliably available through the promotion of efficient agricultural and livestock production, this could prevent the consumption of bats and primates.

Regular inter-sectoral surveillance and exchange of disease occurrence could make both human and veterinary health services more prepared and efficient in responding to endemic and epidemic diseases. In fact, WHO and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN

(FAO) have proposed in the past that public health and veterinary services should collaborate in order to deliver health interventions at a lower cost. Between 2000 and 2005, the Swiss Tropical Institute implemented several vaccination campaigns that were run jointly by the Ministries of Health and of Livestock Production (hosting the veterinary services) in Chad. Sharing their resources such as cold chains and transport and targeting nomadic livestock-owning communities enabled both services to reach communities they would not normally have been able to, because of poor infrastructure and large distances to travel. The campaigns proved hugely successful, with nomadic children fully vaccinated for the first time as well as livestock, and were appreciated by the pastoralists who value their health of livestock as highly as their families.

The main barrier to these kinds

of campaigns becoming commonplace in resource-limited settings is the absence of communications between the different governmental departments required for a change in policy. Furthermore, veterinary services, whether public or private, are often lacking in structure in low-income countries. It has been suggested that communication should start with educational partnerships, training medical and veterinary practitioners to think in a more holistic way and consider innovative cost-saving interventions in their own settings. Perhaps promotion of the 'one health' approach and improved communications between different health sectors could strengthen health care systems where they are weakest. Even in the UK it is not uncommon for farmers to ask the vet about their own ailments – with the correct training, vets could be an invaluable resource in the provision of

primary care, assisting with health surveillance and seamlessly bridging the gap between primary care and public health.

To truly prevent outbreaks of ebola all over the world, the infection needs to be stopped in its tracks at the source. Until the low income areas of Africa have a health infrastructure that is robust and efficient enough to deal with detection and isolation of emerging cases, the risk of spillovers and spreading will remain.

As a zoonotic disease set within a web of economic, political and anthropological problems, ebola must be tackled and prevented using a holistic interdisciplinary approach; perhaps vets could be a key resource in surveillance of the virus in wildlife, discouraging consumption of bushmeat through the promotion of food security, and also in strengthening the health systems themselves.



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# Why more than clinical content counts

By Amber Rosenzweig (4th Year, RVC)

**Every veterinary student I've met wants to gain as much clinical knowledge as possible during their time at vet school. The problem with this is that everything else that we are supposed to learn on our course effectively gets pushed aside. Public health? Welfare? Ethics? Business? These are deemed unimportant as students push through the material heaped upon us in a desperate attempt just to memorise as many diseases and disorders as possible.**

The problem with this is that students are missing the bigger picture. As veterinary surgeons, our duty is not only to each individual patient, but also to the public. Veterinarians are citizens in part of an increasingly global community and these other topics matter. In fact, topics such as public health and animal welfare are what we're seeing in the spotlight much more than things such as feline hyperthyroidism.

What we're forgetting is that

every patient comes with an owner and every owner is part of the public whose concerns extend beyond that of the health care of their animals. People worry about the next big disease outbreak. Remember the fear that was generated by outbreaks of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) or swine flu. Clients often turn to their vets with questions, such as about the outbreak of ebola, and they expect answers. Vets are supposed to be knowledgeable professionals: no, we're not ever going to know everything, but too many students are missing this bigger picture.

## Get informed

Disease outbreaks aside, other topics are increasingly of concern as well. Things like food safety from *E coli* contaminated spinach to the horsemeat scandal. Another area of growing discussion is that regarding animal welfare and sustainability. These questions have left some individuals questioning whether they should be eating animals at all.

We need to be informed about these topics in order to maintain relationships with our clients and to

maintain the confidence of the public as a profession. I'm embarrassed to say that lectures on issues such as those mentioned in the introduction to this article – having been mostly moved to Wednesday – have even been dubbed 'optional Wednesdays' by some and have elicited bribes with food in a desperate attempt to get students to attend. How can this be possible? How is there not a sense of greater duty among fellow students to serve our communities in these professional capacities?

I challenge you to become an informed individual, to expand your interests, to be better rounded and to take full advantage of the gifted lecturers and clinicians that you are currently surrounded by because, chances are, never again in your lifetime will you have such an opportunity. We need to uphold our duties to the profession to the best of our abilities and we also need to first and foremost protect the welfare of the animals devoted to our care. A simple understanding of clinical conditions is not enough for us to address these bigger issues that affect the largest population of animals and people.

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# Overseas travel grants 2015

The BVA operates a range of grant programmes for overseas projects, details of which are listed below



## BVA overseas travel grants 2015

Veterinary undergraduates can apply for travel grants to support research projects in developing countries in 2015. This year, students in any year—not just those in their clinical years—can apply. Thanks to the continued support of **Vetwork UK**, we can offer two additional grants. While grant applications for all types of projects overseas are invited, projects reflecting the work of **Vetwork UK** or relating to livestock or other species of importance to overseas communities, would be particularly welcomed. The awards are worth up to £500 each and a maximum of six grants are available. Applicants should be attending a veterinary school in the UK and must be student members of the BVA. They should be undertaking a research project which will be of benefit to the country concerned. The project should be the applicant's own.

🌐 Apply by 5pm on Monday 16 February 2015.

### **i** Further information

If you would like to receive an application form or need further information then please contact Susie Child (BVA, Vetwork, TAWS and Donkey Sanctuary grants) or Helena Cotton (Harry Steele-Bodger Memorial Scholarship) at the BVA (at the address below), or visit the student pages at [www.bva.co.uk](http://www.bva.co.uk)

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## Harry Steele-Bodger Memorial Scholarship 2015

This BVA scholarship is in memory of Henry W Steele-Bodger, BVA President from 1939 to 1941. The scholarship is intended to assist a visit by an individual to a veterinary or agricultural school or research institute, or another course of study approved by the governing committee. The award is open to graduates of the veterinary schools in the UK and Ireland who have been qualified not more than three years, and to penultimate and final-year students. The sum available for the 2015 award is expected to be about £1000.

🌐 Apply by 5pm on Wednesday 8 April 2015.

**All applicants must be members of BVA.**

# Arguments for and against using the title Dr

By Kaz Strycharczyk (4th Year, Cambridge) and Henry Lamb (2nd Year, RVC)

**The RCVS, under the direction of its President, Stuart Reid, recently held a consultation on whether or not UK vets should be allowed to use the courtesy title of ‘Dr’. A poll on the AVS Facebook page found that 97 per cent of respondents were in favour of the optional title. Some AVS members have put in their penny’s-worth – if you’d like to let us know your opinion, why not send it in for the next edition of JAVS. Here, Kaz Strycharczyk and Henry Lamb discuss the pros and cons.**

## Should vets be able to use the title Dr?

### Arguments for adopting the title

- It brings parity with doctors or dentists in the UK, both of whom have the option to use the title Dr; and whose training is of similar length and breadth.
- It brings parity with other vets in the USA, Australia, New Zealand and parts of Europe, all of whom have the option to use the title Dr.
- It highlights the level of training required to become a vet.
- It will increase respect for those adopting the title.
- Vets are termed ‘veterinarians’ in the USA, as opposed to ‘veterinary surgeons’, which invalidates the historical quirk argument (see below).

### Arguments against adopting the title

- As veterinary surgeons, we align ourselves with human medical surgeons who style themselves Mr/Ms/Mrs due to a historical quirk.
- It is misleading as vets are neither PhD holders nor medical doctors.
- It may distance the client, to the detriment of the vet-client relationship.

## Doctor Who?

Kaz Strycharczyk

Sitting here at the tail-end of the academic year, I face the very real possibility of being able to practise under the title ‘Dr’ after I graduate. My grandmother will be very impressed. However, I’ve found myself increasingly uncomfortable with the idea, but I appear to be in a vanishing minority, according to the AVS Facebook poll. I don’t think this is an issue that we ought to waste much time on – it obviously pales in comparison with stuff like antimicrobial resistance, non-stun slaughter, etc. That being said, the profession is changing. As students, we ought

to ensure that it is one we can be proud of.

The main arguments brought by the ‘pro’ camp relate to parity and clarity. Medical doctors have used the title for millenia, and British dentists were extended the courtesy by the General Dental Council in 1995. Internationally, many vets use the title too. Some might say that the vets of Britain are outliers, down-trodden and ill-respected. What’s more, increasing numbers of EU graduates are coming to the UK, carrying their title with them, wreak-

ing more confusion and chaos than Peter Capaldi in Dr Who. Permitting the use of the title Dr would solve these issues, and bring us into harmony with rest of the veterinary and medical community worldwide just as the global health community is (rightly) crying out for coherent multidisciplinary leadership.

I disagree. While the clarity argument holds more water, I struggle with idea that a significant portion of our clients become confused by some vets being called Dr and others being called Mr or Ms. This is already the case where a practice has vets with doctorates on the roster, for example. In any case, aren’t the post-nominals (which you would have to use to qualify your use of doctor) even more confusing to the general public? A number of dentists in the UK have been caught out by apparently misleading use of their courtesy title. To top it off, since this title would be optional, there is just as much scope for decreasing, not increasing, the level of uniformity across UK vets.

On parity, the argument is even weaker, partly because parity of what exactly we’re talking about is not clear. Presumably it isn’t about how hard we are likely to work in our professional life, otherwise we’d have given nurses the title decades ago. Is it more to do with technical ability? Are we claiming to have more expertise than an engineer, an architect, an Olympic athlete or an orchestra conductor? And, even if

this were the case, why the need to compulsively advertise it? Having a significant amount of your self-worth invested in the letters appearing before your name is a major character flaw, not grounds for a legitimate

*‘...aren’t  
post-nominals  
even more confusing  
to the general  
public?’*

grievance. Most importantly, vets are not medics. We do similar but different things. I made a very conscious choice at 17 not to become a medical doctor, and I do not see vets as a knock-off medics. Why then are we willing copycats?

The debate I have seen among vet students has been framed largely in terms of respect. They feel that as vets and veterinary students we don't receive enough of it, especially considering the amount medical doctors attract. I agree that the profession has an image problem, and understand why grabbing a privilege off the medics might provide a balm to a slow burning resentment. But respect is not won with a title, or at least it shouldn't be. Speak to a medic about the dentists' use of the title Dr. I would bet my student loan that their response is overwhelmingly not one of respect. Attempting to ape the medics and dentists is not the answer. Identifying real issues and effecting genuine change might be.

## Vets as doctors?

Henry Lamb

'Mittens, the doctor will see you now' may soon be a sentence that startles a beloved kitten. Well, maybe not exactly, but this mild hyperbole does serve to highlight that there could soon be a potential change in the way vets in the UK may be seen by both the public and their international peers.

As with all things, there are two sides to the argument: some believe

that this is a positive step forward in enabling vets to be seen as professionals, equal in training and skills to doctors or dentists, as well as their fellow vets abroad, whereas others feel that this will lead to confusion among the public as vets are neither medical doctors nor PhD holders.

As is to be expected, I'm sure some members of the veterinary profession and the vet student body will rush to support this potential move as the title Dr brings a certain level of prestige that few other words can provide. Before jumping on the bandwagon, however, I feel that perhaps we should stop to think carefully before changing the status quo.

I had always considered the fact that vets are separated from doctors and dentists in the titles that they assume a healthy aspect to the client-vet relationship; the title 'Dr' can be seen as a cold or detached addition, whereas without it the vet seems more approachable or even a bit more down to earth. Yet on the flip-side, it bestows a certain level of respectability that also serves to reassure the client that the veterinary surgeon is a well-trained individual who can be trusted with the patient's care.

The previous statement raises another key issue in the discussion, however. Veterinary graduates in the UK are termed veterinary surgeons. This is part of the reason why they currently don't use the title Dr, as

human surgeons – due to a historical quirk – do not assume the title as a way of distinguishing them from physicians. This is surely an outdated argument as to why vets should not be titled Dr. However, in the USA,

vets are not called veterinary surgeons, but simply 'veterinarians', better demonstrating that vets hold a wide breadth of skills that are not limited to surgery; vets are the animal GPs, midwives, anaesthetists, dentists . .

. the list goes on.

This list shows how the role of a vet has changed drastically since its creation. The word veterinarian stems from the Latin word 'veterinarius', meaning 'to work with working animals/beasts of burden' (a veterinarian was a soldier in the Roman army who cared for the animals used for logistical purposes). Yet the modern vet does not purely work with livestock or pack animals – vets contribute to public health, aim to protect farmers' livelihoods, and care for family pets (a Norfolk-based vet recently operated on a constipated goldfish, which highlights the extremes to which veterinary care has now reached).

In other words, the nature of the profession is a varied, challenging, highly skilled one that cannot be simply categorised into one of its many aspects, nor should the level of academic achievement required to enter it be belittled or disregarded. Surely its members should be titled accordingly?

*'The role of a vet has changed drastically since its creation'*



# Challenging tradition

By Jonathan Mayer (Senior Rep, 4th Year, Nottingham)

**Since I was young I wanted to be a vet. The proof can be seen in a school book on the right – where eight-year-old me confirms this.**

Since I was little I've encountered 'Dad's sick cows', but since training as a vet student, I've started to question 'Why are they sick?' These thoughts have progressed to 'I don't want to treat sick cows – they shouldn't be sick in the first place.' This mentality seems to have become established in my brain, be it for better or worse.

I find it challenging, being taught the current gold standard for animal health and welfare at university, and then going home and seeing animals that are, on the whole, healthy but not doing as well as they could be. I'm not the first to admit that scientific methodology has caused problems in the past; the spread of paratuberculosis (Johne's disease) to name just one. Yet it has more grounding than 'I've always done it this way and I've farmed for 40 years so it works'. This tradition is leading to a loss of animal potential, which ultimately, is a loss of money. That's what farming is – flora and fauna – if you don't get as much as you can in a time period or land area then you make less money.

So going back to home, the loss of potential I see is hard to bear. It



has led to numerous loud 'conversations' around the heavy pine table, with it always coming back to 'There you go with the science again, it means nothing on this farm'. I admit that, with 40 years – a lifetime of farming (most jail sentences are shorter), he has more experience than me, although it is as a multi-disciplinary tradesman. However, modern needs and demands require separate trades; farming, veterinary surgery etc, in order to progress into specialisation. No longer can you be mother (to calves), lover (AI), carer (general husbandry) and child (milker) to a herd of animals as successfully as you once could. (If you can, I doff my proverbial cap and implore the teaching of your methods to the masses.) To do all that, fill in the paper work and live a life ... I don't think it can be done.



Here, I come back to the heavy pine table conversation, where I was told to 'live your life for me'. This makes me think that farmers like my father are a dying breed; the last of the 'weekend specialists', whose gold standards can't be achieved without substantial investment and training so they continue the 'white standard' – producing milk on the experience and knowledge they have.

This is where I find myself 18 months from graduating, trying to teach an old dog new tricks so that one day he can achieve gold.

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# Bear welfare

By Seth Kennard (2nd Year, RVC)

**As vet students, I hope we can all agree that animal abuse and neglect is wrong, and failing to care and accommodate for a wild animal's needs would be classed as neglect. Zoos around the world now work tirelessly to enrich their animals' environment, giving both natural stimuli and puzzles that often use plastic bottles, barrels or anything capable of carrying food.**

So, what do we think about the film, Paddington? I know it's just a story and the bear is computer-generated imagery, but can it be that the producers think that by having Hugh Bonneville in the film, viewers will ignore the fact that a bear's needs are nowhere near being catered for? Paddington, who must be a spectacled bear (*T ornatus*), is shown in the film struggling to adapt. Scenes of him making a mess in bathroom, and other seemingly hilarious circumstances in which he seems to find

himself, really just hide the truth that the Brown family can't look after him properly.

## Natural diet

The natural diet for a spectacled bear is more herbivorous than most bears, with around only 7 per cent of their diet being meat, with bark, cactus, palm nuts and orchid bulbs forming the rest. Nowhere on this list is there a marmalade sandwich, which surely cannot provide a rich and healthy diet. The spectacled bear, which is found over a wide range of the Andean mountains, is good at adapting to different habitats, from grasslands to deserts, and excels in humid mountain forests. So, although these bears do well at adapting to new environments, I firmly believe that Paddington could not adequately adapt to living in a London townhouse. We've even imposed our own cultural ideology onto Paddington, changing his name from 'bear language', which was considered to be unpronounceable for the Brown family.

As well as Paddington's wellbeing, we should also look at the risks the

Brown family are ultimately exposing themselves to. Zoonosis poses a threat, as well as Paddington being equally exposed to anthroponosis, although there is little research into the risks posed with sharing your house with a bear. By smuggling himself into the country on a lifeboat (as happens in the original books), Paddington has probably broken the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, although the issue is a bit vague when discussing an animal transporting itself.

Paddington isn't the only high profile fictitious bear. Winnie the Pooh, whose species is officially listed as teddy bear, was inspired by Winnie, a Canadian black bear. Pooh lives happily with his friends in the Hundred Acre wood, with much more space than Paddington, and with greater freedom than many domesticated animals, although he lacks vital social interaction with other bears of his species.

Clearly, it's important to separate fact from fiction when thinking about animal welfare.

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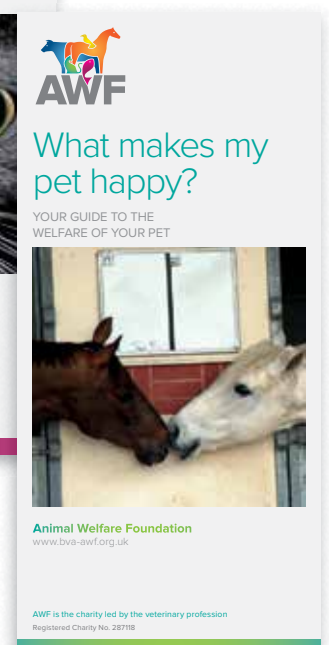
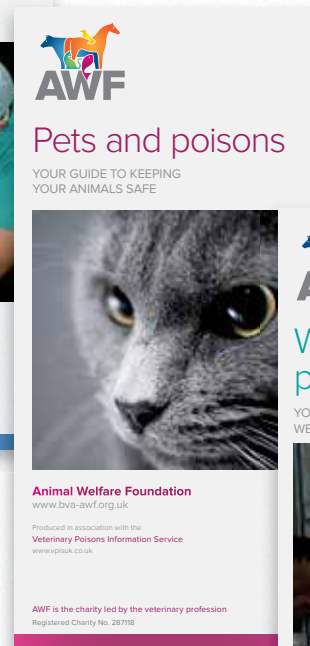
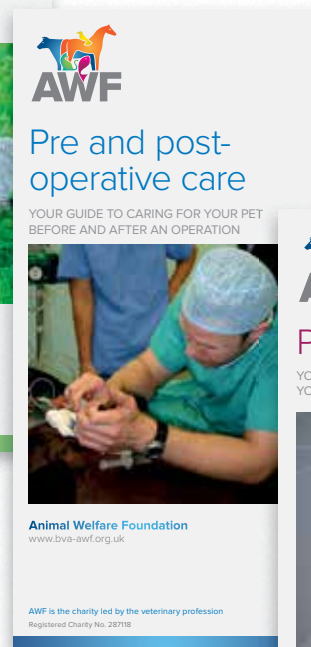
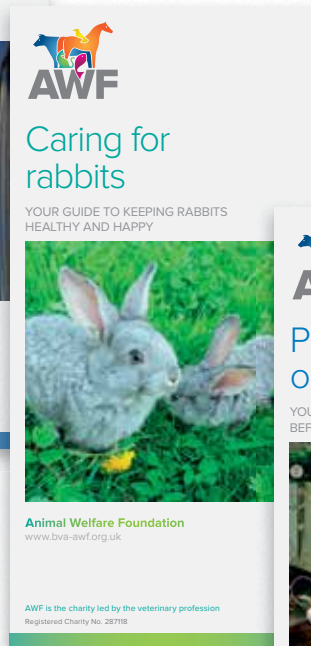
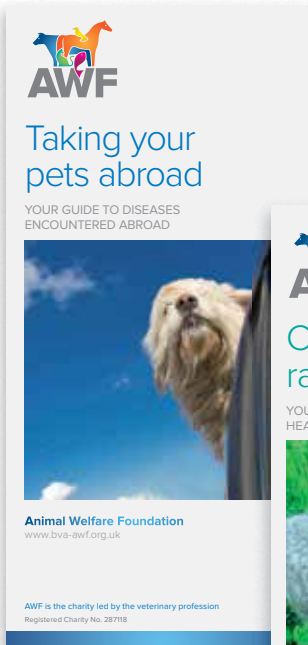
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# It's more than just the final score

By Zoe McDonald (Final-Year, Glasgow)



**Everyone loves winning; nothing can beat the thrill of a good victory. But what really makes a victory count is what we experience along the way. This is something I have realised over the course of five years on the women's football team and, in fact, five years at vet school.**

As a fresher, I was keen to try a new sport and when the vet school teams promoted their social calendars, I chose football. I hadn't played since primary school, so I wasn't much good to begin with.

However, when I left the first practice session, instead of feeling like I had two left feet, I felt as though I had found a team to be part of and had met some lovely people. Over the first term my skills improved and the vigorous fitness sessions whipped me into shape, but the other girls kept mentioning 'Dick Day'. I had no idea how serious the day was – I knew that we were going to be play-

ing Edinburgh, our biggest and only rivals – but I had no idea what to expect. As the day drew closer, the team became more focused and the 'adrenalin' built. My first Dick Day match is a complete blur now, except for the fact that we won for the first time in years and the atmosphere was electric. Five years on, having won three times and lost twice on penalties, I completely understand the highs and lows of the team and how much being a part of it means. When I first went to a practice session, I didn't appreciate the huge difference that football could make to my time at vet school.

Unfortunately, vet school sports teams have the reputation of being rowdy and, in some cases, a liability to the reputation of the vet school to which they belong. I think it's a shame that teams never get remembered or rewarded for their achievements on the pitch and get little support or guidance.

To me, these teams are a vital part of the vet school community and in many cases an outlet for hardwork-

ing students. By joining the football team, I have made friends in every year of the vet school and been able to give and receive support and advice. I have also improved my teamwork and leadership skills and, more than anything, I have so much more passion for my vet school. Rather than viewing sports teams as a negative influence on the vet school community, I feel they are the glue that holds the community together.

My final football season at vet school has certainly been one to remember. As with every year and a new intake of freshers, the team gained some new blood and our new kit gave us a new look. Training was great fun and a pre-Dick Day match saw us win in style 9-4. Dick Day arrived with all the usual nerves and excitement, but within a few minutes, we had scored our first goal and went from strength to strength. When the final whistle blew we had triumphed 7-1. However, our team has a much greater value than any score line.

# Sunshine to milk: a vet student's perspective

By Rupert Sheppard (3rd year, Bristol)

**A year ago, while sitting in the library contemplating my pharmacology notes, I had a moment of inspiration and booked flights to New Zealand. After what seemed like a lot of planning, I finally left for the far side of the world last July.**

For those of you unfamiliar with dairying in New Zealand, it's a big business (currently worth about 10 billion NZ dollars (NZD) to the country's economy). Over the past 15 years, the dairy boom has been enormous. A large amount of the 20 billion litres of milk produced there every year is dried into milk powder and shipped to China. As such, farmer's do not talk about the cost of production per litre or even their milk price in pence per litre; everything is talked about in kg of milk solids (protein + fat) and NZD/milk solid.

It was my intention to spend the majority of my time on a large yet family-run farm. I wanted to find somebody who would be interested in teaching me about spring calving, grass-based dairying.

The farmer I spent most of my time with was an excellent mentor with a thorough grasp of dairying (he also enjoyed a beer too). When I joined them, Tim Rivers and his family were sharemilking 740 cows near Kurow, Canterbury, on the South Island. Share farming, or more specifically, sharemilking is common in New Zealand. There are many types of sharemilking arrangements, but the Rivers were 50:50 sharemilkers, meaning their landlord provides the farmland, the farm buildings and houses, while the farmer provides the staff, cows, machinery and pretty much every-



thing else. They then divide the milk cheque equally.

## Dairy boom

What first strikes you when arrive in New Zealand (especially eastern Canterbury) is just quite how big the dairy boom has been there and how this must have affected the way the landscape looks. I'm sure that 10 years ago when there were only 90,000 cows in Canterbury (today there are more than 2,000,000) it would have looked completely different to the vast expanse of green, with black and whites dots that now stretches as far as the eye can see.

As vet students, we spend a lot of time learning about feeding and housing cattle throughout the year in a bid to control their environment and, ultimately, make them more productive. To go from seeing zero grazing systems, which seem to be gaining popularity in the UK, to working on a farm with over 700 cows but only two sheds (a milking parlour and calf shed) is quite something.

These cows never spend a night

under cover from the age of four-weeks until the end of their productive life, after an average of 4.5 lactations.

We hear lots about how Kiwi farmers lead the world in grass management and this was one of the things I hoped to learn more about. I would say their greatest strength lies in their meticulous recording and measuring what the grass is doing. Every Saturday morning I would do a farm walk of the whole farm with a grass plate meter; a handy piece of kit that gives a real time reading of the current kg of dry matter/hectare of pasture. (Fortunately, Tim had one that worked via lasers and could be pulled using a quad bike). This gives the farmers an accurate average cover of the whole farm and predicted values for the rate of growth expected. The farm had been set up to work on a 22-day round. This means that once the cows had been on a 'break' (the next strip of grass) they would return to the same patch of ground 22 days later. With the accurate measurements



of the cover of the next break we would work out the size of break the cows would need and whether their dry matter intake would need supplementing with silage, which, if necessary, would be fed on the ground.

Before arriving in New Zealand I must admit to having had some preconceived ideas. I thought:

- It would rain every day;
- It would be lush and green everywhere; and
- They would all be obsessed with rugby.

Strangely, I was only proved right by the last of these. I cannot comment for other areas of New Zealand, but on the Canterbury/

Otago border the irrigation systems that have been put in over the past 10 to 15 years are quite unbelievable. I visited a farm with a 1.2 km long pivot irrigator. This machine irrigates over 1110 acres. Nowhere in Britain would you see an expanse of ground so large without hedges, roads or trees, which, of course, have had to make way for the irrigation systems. Neither are these irrigators watering using parlour washing or collected rain water. Water is drained from the fresh water courses throughout New Zealand on a scale I did not think was possible. To these farmers, farming in what were once quite arid conditions, water is worth an extortionate amount to their businesses. And these irrigators are not only limited to flat land either – I was told that several pivot providers are now advertised as being able to climb 40° slopes.

After spending the best part of 12 weeks in New Zealand my eyes have been opened to a new way of looking at farming. Their focus is very much on turning sunshine into food (in their case milk solids), which no matter how, where or what you farm is ultimately what farmers are trying to do.



# Crush rescue

By Christine Simons (Final-Year, Glasgow)

**It was a typical Wednesday afternoon at a Highland vet practice. We were to TB test a 40-cow beef herd and cut and dehorn a few calves. The plan was that with the relatively straightforward job done, we would go back to the practice for an hour's chill out before evening consultations began. However, the afternoon didn't go exactly to plan . . .**

I should have been more prepared when I noticed there were two cows on the list that didn't get their first TB test due to 'escaping'. In the shed, sheltered from the Scottish weather, we had gone through five cows when the second escapee appeared. She went wild, thrashing about and going down before the vet had even clipped her neck.

We released her head from the yoke but quickly realised she was



collars before resorting to lifting the crush up again and tipping her out.

I'm not sure who was more pleased at the success. She was a bit wobbly, had lost a bit of hair over her pin bones and had a small graze on one eyelid but, remarkably, she was otherwise fine – she

stuck at the hips on each side of the ancient crush. Initially we thought nothing of it and tried some gentle persuasion from the back end with the crush door wide open, and then the application of a headcollar and less gentle persuasion from the head end.

When this proved unsuccessful, the farmer (75 years old) disappeared to get his (also ancient) Massey Ferguson and drag the crush out into the yard and the rain. There then followed a series of interesting manoeuvres involving hoisting the crush up from the loader forks to try and tip the grumpy inhabitant out. But to no avail – she was well and truly stuck. An angle grinder was fetched used to cut the back right panel open, giving the cow

space to swing her hips and stand up. The sharp ends of the crate were covered with an old feed sack to prevent injury and the cow prodded once more.

This was again unsuccessful, so we tried a few more things with ropes and head-

retreated to the other side of the yard and quickly disappeared into the field. We then pushed the crush back into the shed, patched up the hole at the back and carried on with the test reading. A one-hour job ended up taking three, and we finished up cutting and dehorning by torchlight.

Cows get trapped in crushes often, particularly big cows in old small crushes. Our episode demonstrates that there's always a way to unstuck the cow, with perseverance, even if the crush has to be taken to pieces.

The vet I was with, having nearly 40 years' experience working on farms, said he'd never seen such an extreme case of a crush rescue. The incident also highlights the potential of serious injury that comes with working with livestock – no-one got hurt in this situation, but there were several near misses.

After destroying two headcollars and half a crush, the rescue was a success. Ironically, however, the cow was found dead the next day, having drowned herself in the river. Perhaps the thought of going back in a crush to have her TB test read was just too much, but that's the unpredictability of working with animals.



# Fancy dress top tips

By Tom Cantor, (Senior Rep, 4th Year, Bristol)

**Fancy dress is a key part of the vet student life. Vet students love to invent unique costumes almost as much as they love animals and reading JAVS. After four years of vet socials where fancy dress is expected at every opportunity, I have learnt a few dos and don'ts about the art form. The following is a collection of helpful tips that I hope will give you some inspiration.**



## Tip 1. Go as a group

Group outfits are better. This is a technique especially useful for those who get embarrassed – there is, after all, safety in numbers. This phrase can be applied equally to the more controversial themes (like the upcoming example) and to making sure people get the joke (if the group know what they are, the chances are others will too).

The Christmas party at Bristol is also a fancy dress theme and in my third year my group attended dressed as the most Christmassy thing we could think of . . . Jesus. This outfit was simple enough, a bed sheet for robes tied up with a red sash, topped off with long hair and beard ordered online.

## Tip 2. Cross dressing

Every bloke needs to cross dress at vet school at least once. In my experience, these are the costumes that guys enjoy the most (certainly among my mates). With an increasing female trend within the profession it is important for the few guys left to be able to get in touch with their feminine side and see the world from their perspective. If you're reading as a guy who hasn't ever dressed as the other team and you're a bit embarrassed, refer to tip 1.

The example that comes to mind is the 'Old Woman'. The theme for the night was old people (estab-

lished students) and babies (freshers) for a freshers welcome bar crawl. Me and my friends decided to give it the old transgender twist and popped down the high street to find the ugliest dresses possible to become convincing grannies. Best part about it was my entire outfit cost £2. This brings me to tip 3...

## Tip 3. Charity shops

Here in Bristol there is a charity shop on every corner and they're like little walk-in fancy dress wardrobes. I highly recommend checking your local British Heart Foundation or Oxfam whenever putting togeth-

er a new outfit. Not only is it good for keeping costs down and coming up with ideas, there is also that fulfilling feeling of being charitable.

Recommended items include dresses, handbags, necklaces, coloured trousers, hats, gloves, scarves.

## Tip 4. Hang on to your costumes

Whatever you manage to still be wearing when you get home, put it in a box or a bag in storage, preferably after a good wash. Items can always be recycled. Having a bank of items helps reduce cost of frequent fancy dressing and can also help with inspiration for what to go as. ▶



### Tip 5. Face paint

As you may have noticed from AVS Sports Weekend, face paint is a favourite at Bristol. It is actually one of the three rules set out for every Sports Weekend costume worn by Bristol vets (1. No sexy versions; 2. No clumsy props 3. Full face paint non-optional). I think with any costume, if it's possible to, work some paint in!

Examples for using full face paint costumes include: Smurf, devil, mime, baboon, giraffe, Zoidberg (just add red swim cap and marigolds).

Next time your vet school is having a fancy dress social I hope this advice will come in handy. If you are every really stuck for ideas there are always boiler suits, back to school and toilet paper mummies.



## Avoiding holiday homicide

By Jess Timmins (2nd Year, RVC)

**You've just finished your first term back at uni. For some of us, exams are over and after a couple of nights out we are ready to head home, relax and to be looked after for a few weeks. Others may need the space and time away from vet school chaos to crack on with revision for exams. Whatever the case, after some time living with the freedom to do and live as you please with your friends, going home for the holidays can be hard. You had forgotten about family politics and who wasn't speaking to whom. You had forgotten you weren't allowed to leave days' worth of dirty clothes on the floor, and you had forgotten that there was just nothing to do.**

Being a country girl, moving from Yorkshire to London was a bit of a culture shock. In first year I looked forward to returning home, seeing the trees and getting some fresh air with my dog. After a year in London,

I realise that I won't live here forever; and if you explore what the city has to offer; it is a fantastic place to live; just different to home.

Although we often have mixed feelings about returning home, here are some tips on how to cope, and make the most of it.

- Arrange to catch up with an old friend. It can be refreshing and inspiring to meet up with friends from school/college. Find out about what they are up to now and enjoy some chat about non-vet school related things or; alternatively, tell them how awesome your term was. Just maybe don't ask them to go for dinner if you want to tell them about lambing or your surgery rotation.

- Cook dinner for your parents. It will sweeten them up and keep you busy.

- Enjoy some quality time with your pet(s). Remember why you wanted to be a vet in the first place!

- Learn how to bite your tongue.

- Try to arrange placements at times that are convenient for everyone, ie, don't agree to 5 am milking if you are expecting a lift from your brother!

- Appreciate and enjoy having food

in the fridge and being allowed to turn the heating on.

- Get your washing done using fabric softener and appreciate the power of a tumble dryer.

### Family support

It is important to remember that our families are a major part of our support network, and we need to use and appreciate them for this. Although they may not understand the pathogenesis of feline panleukopenia virus (actually, I don't think I do either) they are there for us when we want to complain about it, and occasionally need to break down and cry about it! They are there to offer us cups of tea, and tell us when we've been working too hard, give us lifts to the back of beyond for placements and wash our shit-covered overalls. Personally, I like to think a mental image of me, covered in cow poo in the pouring rain, being electrocuted while chasing a runaway heifer back to the parlour, makes it worth it for them!

So, appreciate being at home while you are there. It won't be long before you're back with your friends living on your own terms again, and when you are, don't forget to call home every few weeks!



# How to dissect a Veterinary Record

By Hannah Clifford (Junior Rep, 4th Year, Cambridge)

**In the first three years as a vet student, how many of you regularly read your weekly magazine from the BVA? I know that some copies are lucky to make it out of their plastic wrapper before being consigned to the 'must read at some point' pile.**

Coming from a family where nothing is thrown away in case it may be useful one day, while I rarely had time to read my magazines, I carefully collected a large pile – even lugging them to and from university or putting them into my allocated university storage. I think I sacrificed a few, but last summer I felt that it was time to see what had been happening in the profession over the past three years and to see if they were a good read.

On my first read, I discovered they contained a lot of information; and there was a large pile to work my way through. There was news and comment, reports from society meetings, featured articles to celebrate 125 years of the Vet Record, research, letters, product updates, disease surveillance, obituaries, career advice and job adverts. All of these, except the disease surveillance, were there each week. This was going to be a rather large task. Was it going to be worthwhile? I decided to start anyway and see how I got on; I hadn't kept them for this long just to throw them away.

I soon developed a knack of dissecting an issue to extract the best bits with optimum efficiency. I would go through and read any news/comments/obituaries at the time and then I would tear out the feature articles and research for reading later. I also kept the careers information, as I felt this was definitely something I could use

in the future. My aim was to reduce the size of the pile to what I hoped would be one manageable folder.

I found that, surprisingly, you can read news from two years ago and find it interesting. I was able to spot some common recurring themes; bovine TB and tendering, corporatisation of the profession, the gender balance, 24-hour cover, antimicrobial resistance and use, the PET travel scheme, bluetongue, Schmallenburg and the increasing number of vet students.

I kept all of the feature articles from the celebration of 125 years series as a collection for the future, and because they provided a history of the changes that have occurred in one particular area that made fascinating reading. I only chose the research articles that interested me – generally large animal and equine with a smattering of small animal ones. The nice thing about the research article summaries was that they were concise – no more than an A4 page, which, having attempted to read full scientific papers for a year, seemed like bliss!

I had expected that I would find research articles on topics that would catch my attention and finding out what was going on in the profession would be the most interesting. However, much to my surprise, and somewhat a little morbidly, it was the obituaries that were my favourite. It is a huge cliché, but finding out what people had done with their lives having completed a veterinary degree really opened my eyes and broadened my horizons. So many of these vets, who were from a completely different generation, had done so much with their lives. They had travelled to far flung places, sometimes taking their families; some worked in less developed countries making a huge difference to the lives of the local people



before heading back to Britain for a stint and then returning again to the unknown. Both in private practice and as State Veterinary Surgeons they had been at the forefront of things that we now take for granted and studied whatever subject that fascinated them (or got thrown at them) in great detail.

The careers pages provided a current version of events with similar stories about the huge variety of roles veterinary graduates work in and the routes that have taken them there. I know that we are told that going into practice is not our only option once we have graduated, but reading about what real people have done has really highlighted the opportunities available. I am looking forward to going into practice as much as ever, and I still intend to stay practising for most of my working life, but I will keep an eye out for any opportunities that come up.

I reduced my collection into just one folder, filed in sections by species or topic to start reading them properly. Then term arrived again and time disappeared while more Vet Records appeared. Although I didn't quite keep up, I did manage to read a couple of them as they

came and found that, having finally started clinical years, I could now understand more of it. Articles such as disease surveillance actually made quite good revision material for the infectious diseases exam I had last term, and showed veterinary public

health in action to make lectures appear more relevant.

I am glad that when my parents questioned the need to fill up the car with them on the way home for summer I didn't just give in. I've learnt quite a lot and, no doubt

helped by the fact that I'm now in clinical years, feel much more in touch with the profession I've wanted to be part of for as long as I can remember. Now there's just the small issue of the rest of last term's pile to sort through...

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