

# AVS Welfare Day

## November 2016

On Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> November 2016, AVS hosted its first ever Welfare Day at the University of Nottingham. Welfare representatives from all the universities were invited to participate in a variety of welfare sessions, as well as being given the opportunity to share ideas with each other and make new contacts. The recent AVS/BVA survey highlighted several mental health issues affecting vet studies, with 63% reporting to have suffered from stress whilst at university. Through initiatives like the welfare weekend and our welfare grants, AVS is committed to improving student wellbeing and ensuring that students are well equipped to enter the veterinary profession.

Dr Rosie Allister, the director of Vetlife, began the day with an interactive seminar about recognising distress in vet students and how best to approach it. This included an oversight into some of the common causes of stress in vet students and mental health in general, with a large focus on the stigmas surrounding mental



*Peer Support mock reflective practice session*

wellbeing in the veterinary profession. The welfare reps then had a session on the benefits of a peer support system in a university setting, led by Tina Usherwood, the director of Peer Support at Liverpool University, who also imparted her experience on how best to introduce and maintain of this system. Volunteers from Liverpool's peer support then gave a fantastic demonstration of a mock reflective practice session, allowing students an insight into how peer support works in practise, as well as providing a question and answer session.



*Mind Matters Mental First Aid Course*

Trevor Bell, from Mind Matters Initiative, then took the reps through a mental health first aid course, with particular focus on the characteristics of depression and how to approach others in a conscientious way and to sign-post effectively. The reps participated in several interactive and thought-provoking activities, in particular the use of 'non judgemental listening' as a technique to make those they support feel comforted and safe when talking to their reps.

Many thanks to Vetlife, Liverpool Peer Support and Mind Matters Initiatives for their fantastic sessions, and also to our sponsors Med Equus Ltd and CPD solutions for their generous donations. Finally thank you to everyone who attended the event, it was great to see so many people interested in improving student welfare!



*Vetlife Interactive Seminar*

Some comments from those who attended Welfare Day:

“Brilliant day - so many skills learnt- really good knowledge and understanding, invaluable for anyone- feel privileged to get this information”

[Concerning Mind Matters Initiative] - “Fantastic teaching, I wish that more veterinary students, especially first year students and qualified vets, received this useful teaching”.

“[The welfare reps] were enthusiastic, fun, and participated really well- they kept me on my toes with their probing and searching questions, which I loved. Given [the] interest shown during the session they are going to make such a difference in terms of student wellbeing and keeping their own mental health tip top.” - Trevor Bell, Mind Matters Initiative.