UNDERSTANDING & SUPPORTING VETERINARY MENTAL HEALTH

THE FIRST MIND MATTERS INITIATIVE RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

AGENDA AND ABSTRACTS

20 JANUARY 2017
THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
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THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
Dear colleague

I would like to extend a very warm welcome to the University of Edinburgh for this, our first Mind Matters Initiative Research Symposium – Understanding and Supporting Veterinary Mental Health.

The Mind Matters Initiative (MMI) has been running since the end of 2014. Research into mental health issues in the profession predates MMI by many years, and although some are aware of the areas covered and its outputs, this awareness may be somewhat limited.

Far too many members of the veterinary team struggle with poor mental health and/or low levels of wellbeing. Interventions clearly need to be evidence-based, but research funding is always in short supply, and the situation is compounded when the structure is not there to share what’s happening and define where the gaps in our knowledge remain.

So that’s what this symposium sets out to do – bring together those carrying out valuable research, understand what has been discovered, develop a community that shares and discusses, and think about future research needs.

Many thanks to Rosie Allister for bringing together such an exciting programme for us today. We have an inspiring line up of speakers, covering a wide variety of topics – surely fruitful ground on which we can build a strong community and continue to make a real difference to the lives of vets, nurses and students.

Enjoy the day, and please contribute your thoughts and ideas: today is about all of us, not just our excellent speakers.

Best wishes

Neil Smith MRCVS
Chair, RCVS Mind Matters Initiative

“This symposium sets out to bring together those carrying out valuable research, understand what has been discovered, develop a community that shares and discusses, and think about future research needs”
Thursday 19 January 2017

19.30-22.00  Dinner and networking
St Leonard’s Hall, University of Edinburgh, 18 Holyrood Park Road, Edinburgh EH16 5AY

Friday 20 January 2017

8.30-16.30  Symposium
South Hall Complex, Pollock Halls, University of Edinburgh, 18 Holyrood Park Road, Edinburgh, EH16 5AY

8.30  Registration and refreshments in the South Hall

9.00  Welcome and introduction to the Mind Matters Initiative from Neil Smith, Chair

9.10  Plenary 1
Understanding suicidal behaviour
Professor Rory O’Connor, Professor of Health Psychology at the University of Glasgow, Past President of the International Academy of Suicide Research, UK

9.55  Plenary 2
Disclosure and assessing mental ill-health in the medical profession – what do we know?
Professor Debbie Cohen, Centre for Psychosocial Research, Occupational and Physician Health at the School of Medicine, Cardiff University, UK

10.40  Coffee/tea in the South Hall

11.00  Plenary 3
Protecting and improving mental health at work
Chris O’Sullivan, Head of Workplace Mental Health, Mental Health Foundation, UK

11.45  Expert panel discussion

12.15  SHORT TALKS STREAMS 1:

Stream A – South Hall
Chair: Neil Smith

12.15-12.30  Positive and negative work characteristics for small animal veterinary surgeons in the UK: a qualitative study
Carolyne Crowe

Stream B – Kirkland
Chair: David Bartram

A mixed methods study of mental health and wellbeing in different UK undergraduate student populations
Elisa Lewis
Jacqueline Cardwell
<table>
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<th>Time</th>
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| 12.30-12.45  | **Veterinary transition study** - investigating the transition from veterinary student to veterinary surgeon: prospective cohort study  
Rosie Allister                                             |
| 12.45-13.00  | **Professional skills development and wellbeing in primary care practitioners**  
Stephen May                                                  |
| 13.00-13.15  | **Speaker panel Q&A**                                                    |
| 13.15        | Lunch in the John McIntyre Conference Centre restaurant                   |
| 14.00        | **SHORT TALKS STREAMS 2:**                                               |
|              | **Stream A – South Hall**                                                |
|              | **Chair:** Susan Dawson                                                  |
| 14.00-14.15  | **Empathy and burnout: how can educators help veterinary students develop balance for their future practice?**  
Kirsty Hughes                                               |
| 14.15-14.30  | **Introducing a mindfulness-based intervention to third-year UK veterinary students: a pilot study**  
Eleanor Pontin  
Avril Senior                                                 |
| 14.30-14.45  | **Embedding resilience training into the veterinary curriculum: a pilot study**  
Stacy Spielman                                              |
| 14.45-15.00  | **Start with the students: prevention better than cure?**  
Rosie Herrington                                           |
| 15.00-15.15  | **Speaker panel Q&A**                                                    |
| 15.15        | Coffee/tea in the South Hall                                             |
| 15.30        | **Workshop – Priorities in veterinary mental health research**  
Lizzie Lockett, Mind Matters Initiative Director            |
| 16.30        | Close, with Neil Smith                                                   |
Understanding Suicidal Behaviour

Professor Rory O’Connor PhD CPsychol AFBPsS FAcSS, Professor of Health Psychology at the University of Glasgow, Past President of the International Academy of Suicide Research, UK

Rory leads the Suicidal Behaviour Research Laboratory (www.suicideresearch.info; @suicideresearch) at Glasgow, the leading suicide/self-harm research group in Scotland. He has published extensively in the field of suicide and self-harm, specifically concerning the psychological processes which precipitate suicidal behaviour and self-harm. In addition, he is author of Understanding Suicidal Behaviour (with Noel Sheehy), editor of The Routledge Major Works Series on Suicide (with Keith Hawton) and co-editor of the International Handbook of Suicide Prevention (2nd edition with Jane Pirkis). He was also the UK National Representative for the International Association for Suicide Prevention and is a member of the American Association of Suicidology. He serves on the Scientific Review Board of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and is an Associate Editor of Archives of Suicide Research and Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior. Rory acts as an advisor to a range of national and international organisations including national governments on the areas of suicide and self-harm.

Abstract

Suicide and attempted suicide are major public health concerns with complex aetiologies which encompass a multifaceted array of risk and protective factors. There is growing recognition that we need to move beyond psychiatric categories to further our understanding of the pathways to both. As an individual makes a decision to take their own life, an appreciation of the psychology of the suicidal mind is central to suicide prevention. Another key challenge is that our understanding of the factors that determine behavioural enaction (ie which individuals with suicidal thoughts will act on these thoughts) is limited. Although a comprehensive understanding of these determinants of suicidality requires an appreciation of biological, psychological and social perspectives, the focus in this presentation is primarily on the psychological determinants of self-harm and suicide. The Integrated Motivational–Volitional (IMV) Model of Suicidal Behaviour (O’Connor, 2011) provides a framework in which to understand suicide and self-harm. This tripartite model maps the relationship between background factors and trigger events, and the development of suicidal ideation/intent through to suicidal behaviour. I will present a selection of research studies to illustrate how psychological factors increase suicide risk and what can be done to ameliorate such risk. The implications for the prevention of self-harm and suicide will also be discussed.
Disclosure and assessing mental ill-health in the medical profession – what do we know?

Professor Debbie Cohen OBE MD FFOM FRCGP FRCP FAcadMEd, Centre for Psychosocial Research, Occupational and Physician Health at the School of Medicine, Cardiff University, UK

Debbie is an Occupational Health Physician, Director of Student Support and the Centre for Psychosocial Research, Occupational and Physician Health at School of Medicine, Cardiff University. Debbie undertakes research in physician health as well as running a service for Wales for doctors with mental ill-health. She also undertakes research into mental illness and employment and improving the conversation about work and health in health practitioners. She is a principle investigator at the National Centre for Mental Health in Cardiff, which researches a wide aspect of mental health, including employment issues in Wales. Debbie is the Faculty of Occupational Medicine lead for Physician Health and helped establish in 2011 the UK Association of Physician Health. In 2012 Debbie received the OBE for her contribution to occupational medicine.

Protecting and improving mental health at work

Chris O’Sullivan, Head of Workplace Mental Health, Mental Health Foundation, UK @mentalcapital

Chris leads on workplace mental health for the Foundation. His role combines policy, research and development activities on workplace mental health with corporate partnerships and development of our consultancy and training programmes. He leads a ground-breaking public mental health charity partnership with Virgin Trains West Coast.

Chris’s background is in mental health policy. In addition to workplace mental health Chris has particular interest in service design, and the role of digital technology in mental health. In 2011 Chris was selected as a founding member of the Royal Society of Edinburgh Young Academy of Scotland.
Positive and negative work characteristics for small animal veterinary surgeons in the UK: a qualitative study

Carolyne Crowe, The University of Nottingham and Carolyne Crowe Coaching: UK

Background
The workplace has changed for small animal veterinary surgeons (SAVSs) in the UK in the last 10 years, due to increased corporatisation, feminisation, and increased numbers of veterinary surgeons (VSs). VSs report high levels of workplace stress; however, there has been no qualitative research describing the lived experience of the contemporary small animal practice work environment.

Knowledge on the nature of the psychosocial work environment experienced by SAVSs could help inform sector- and role-specific psychosocial risk assessment activities and interventions to protect and promote health and wellbeing.

Aims
The primary aim of this study was to examine SAVSs’ experiences of work-related psychosocial hazards that if not properly managed could result in harm to health and wellbeing. A secondary aim was to identify positive work characteristics that might promote health and wellbeing.

Method
Qualitative interviews were conducted over the telephone with 17 SAVS employed by a large UK-based corporate. Audio recordings were transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis.

Results
A series of five top-level negative themes were identified. Frustration, stress and challenge were perceived to be a consequence of lack of autonomy, high expectations of clients and of VSs on themselves, their role, and team dynamics. In terms of positive work characteristics, a series of five top-level themes were identified. Autonomy, support, positive client and team interactions, and variety were linked to feelings of fulfilment, satisfaction and reward.

Conclusions
Autonomy is a key work characteristic for SAVSs. Along with good support, autonomy acts a personal resource, possibly buffering individuals from challenges in the rapidly changing contemporary work environment to which they are exposed. Nationwide quantitative research is warranted to confirm the generalisability of these findings.

Veterinary transition study – investigating the transition from veterinary student to veterinary surgeon: prospective cohort study

Rosie Allister, The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies (R(D)SVS), The University of Edinburgh, UK

Background
The veterinary profession has a suicide rate three times that of the general population. The transition to practice is a time of particularly poor wellbeing in veterinary working life. Among vets with experience of suicidal thoughts or behaviour, half report their first experience of suicidal thoughts occurred at this time.

The veterinary transition study (VTS) is a prospective cohort study investigating the transition from veterinary student to practising veterinary surgeon. The study aims to understand veterinary student and new graduate vets’ experiences and perceptions of mental health, wellbeing, and support during the transition to professional work, and to explore the development of professional identity.

Method
The VTS is a qualitative study following 36 veterinary students through their first two years in practice. It is an interview study with data analysed thematically. The study is almost complete.

Results
Building on a previous study which found that 39% of penultimate-year vet students had experienced suicidal thoughts and 18% had self-harmed. Students and new graduate vets in this study described experiences of suicidal thoughts and behaviour whilst at university and in veterinary practice. The study examines how workplace factors and aspects of occupational culture contributed to suicidal thoughts and behaviour and explores how aspects of veterinary professional identity contribute to a culture of reluctance to seek help.

Discussion
This in-depth exploration of mental health and suicide risk in a
professional group at elevated risk of suicide has relevance for others interested in occupational suicide risk, professional health behaviours, and occupational culture.

Professional skills development and wellbeing in primary care practitioners

**Presenting author:** Stephen May, Royal Veterinary College, University of London, UK  
**Co-author:** Tierney Kinnison, Royal Veterinary College, University of London, UK

**Background**  
Several years after graduating, many veterinary surgeons seek alternative careers, reporting disillusionment and/or stress.

**Aim**  
To better understand the beneficial effects, on general (primary care) practitioners, of continuing professional development (CPD) focused on professional competences.

**Research questions**  
How does a CPD professional studies programme benefit participants?

**Method**  
Qualitative content analysis of reflective writing submitted for the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Practice (CertAVP) Professional Key Skills Module. Royal Veterinary College (RVC) Ethics Committee approval and author consent were obtained.

**Results**  
CPD participants recognised improvements in their motivation and learning which led to better communications, greater confidence and empathy for their patients/clients. The learning process often embraced the practice team, and improved individual and practice performance leading to patient/client benefits. Many participants reported a reduction in stress.

More detailed investigation of negative-to-positive emotional state transitions during the programme revealed enhanced coping strategies. Challenges of veterinary work included workload, feelings of inadequacy and ethical dilemmas. Improved coping related to better understanding of the primary care role, reasonable client expectations of their veterinarian and reasonable expectations of themselves. This included reframing of case outcomes around valid criteria of success.

**Discussion**  
This work reveals the need to focus on professional identity in primary care, appropriate measures of success, and the reasonable expectations practitioners can have of themselves. This better matching of identity to role improves confidence and wellbeing.

**Conclusion**  
It is important that practitioner wellbeing is addressed. This includes general practice-focused graduate/CPD outcomes.

A mixed methods study of mental health and wellbeing in different UK undergraduate student populations

**Elisa G Lewis and Jacqueline M Cardwell, Royal Veterinary College, UK**

**Background**  
Research has identified poor mental health and an increased suicide risk in medical occupational groups. However, there has been less research involving the students destined for careers in these fields, and few direct comparative studies. This research aimed to address this omission by estimating and comparing the prevalence of mental ill-health in undergraduate students of medicine, veterinary medicine, dentistry, and pharmacy. Law students were also included who, although arguably subject to similar stressors, do not go on to share a heightened risk of suicide as professionals.

**Method**  
A mixed-methods approach was used. First, a cross-sectional questionnaire incorporating validated psychological tools was used to estimate the prevalence of depression and psychological distress, assess the distribution of personality traits and occurrence of suicide ideation and attempts in each student population. Next, in-depth interviews with students studying veterinary medicine and law were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, to explore students’ lived experiences.

**Findings**  
Quantitative results indicated that law students experienced the poorest mental health of the student groups studied, while
wellbeing was highest among veterinary and medical students. Veterinary students were less perfectionistic than law and pharmacy students. The prevalence of previous suicide attempts was highest among medical students. Qualitative findings suggested that the university environment plays an important role in shaping students’ experiences. Expectations about future careers and a desire to appear invulnerable to illness are also pivotal.

As the first study to compare the mental health of these populations it was possible to establish key differences. Relatively high wellbeing among medical and veterinary students compared with law students contrasts with observations in the professions. Qualitative interviews provided key insights into what it is like to be a veterinary or law student, and how this impacts upon wellbeing. These findings inform discussions around student mental health and provide an evidence base for the development of appropriate support and intervention.

RVNs – How do you cope with stress in practice?

**Presenting author:** Mary Fraser, Vets Now Ltd
**Co-author:** Simon Girling, Girling and Fraser Ltd

**Background**
Stress within the veterinary profession is well documented (Bartram & Baldwin, 2010; Batchelor & McKeegan, 2012; Williams & Robinson, 2014). Previous work by this author has examined how SVN should be taught about the more difficult aspects of practice (Fraser, 2016) and the support that RVNs would like to be able to access (Fraser, 2015).

The aim of this work was to identify and examine in detail how RVNs cope with stressful situations in practice.

**Method and results**
An online questionnaire was developed and made available through NOVI Survey. Only RVNs who had worked in practice in the UK could take part in the research.

A total of 144 responses were analysed qualitatively. The predominant method of coping was that of communication – talking to colleagues, friends or family about their experiences at work. Other themes included adoption of a rational approach or detachment from cases; giving in to emotions (tears or shouting); physical activity or consumption of food/alcohol.

Adaptive coping strategies have been described in veterinary medicine (Lovell & Lee, 2013). This current work identified many different coping mechanisms, but by far the most important was that of being able to talk to someone.

These results highlight the importance of a support network for RVNs in practice to give people the chance to talk through their experiences and feelings – either within or outside of work. Further work is required to understand how to ensure that RVNs can adopt a healthy approach to work and feel supported within that environment.

**Evaluation of humour types evident within UK veterinary practice and their effect on employees and the working environment: do you need a joker in your pack?**

**James Farrell, VetSAT (Veterinary Surgery and Training Ltd), UK**

**Method**
Pilot study being conducted within two small animal veterinary practices (one with >100 employees and the other with less than 15)

**Background**
• Numerous papers/articles in veterinary journals/press on individual vet wellbeing and mental health, as well as concerns for the state of the veterinary profession as a whole (Roulty et al, 2002; Bartram et al, 2009; Mastenbroek et al, 2013; Anon, 2014; Halliwell et al, 2016; Anon, 2016; Woodward, 2016). Does humour have a part to play in this?
• Topical subject with RCVS Mind Matters and Vet Futures projects underway
• The human-animal bond and emotional intelligence have significant roles within our daily work. How does humour fit in, if at all?
• To the author’s knowledge no similar study has been performed
• Author has a passionate interest in this field
Aims
• To identify the prevalence of four humour types within UK veterinary practices
• To assess how employees feel these effect their emotional intelligence and social competence
• To assess how employees feel these effect their working environment in terms of workplace happiness and productivity
• To determine if information gathered might help identify employees needing support
• To construct practical guidelines for employees and employers to provide meaningful support to such colleagues

Initial literature review
On the face of it, this may seem like a simple and superfluous study: everyone loves a laugh, it makes you feel happy, therefore reducing stress and everyone gets on with their job. However, even the briefest of delves into literature on the subject throws up some fascinating information:
• Laughter and humour are not the same thing (Raskin, 2008)
• Of the four types of humour, two largely have positive effects (affiliative and self-enhancing) and two are more negative (aggressive and self-defeating) (Martin et al, 2003; Yip & Martin, 2006)
• Despite being popular and such an integral part of most people's personality (Vernon et al, 2008; Galloway, 2010), humour has been relatively unstudied (scientifically) in the workplace (Lyttle, 2007)
• Spurious claims exist that laughter increases endorphin flow and other writers make untestable claims, such as “humour increases productivity” (Duncan & Feisal, 1989; Lyttle, 2007; Kerr, 2009)
• Managing the use of workplace humour and incorporation into leadership styles can have serious implications (Duncan & Feisal, 1989; Lyttle, 2007)
• Humour style has been shown to have a relationship with interpersonal predictors of suicide and suicidal ideation, allowing tracking and moderation of these factors (Tucker et al, 2013)

Hypotheses
1. Positive humour styles predominate in UK veterinary practice
2. a) Employees feel positive humour styles benefit their own personal wellbeing
   b) Employees feel negative humour styles harm their own personal wellbeing
3. a) Employees feel positive humour styles benefit the workplace environment
   b) Employees feel negative humour styles harm the workplace environment
4. Employees feel positive humour styles increase qualitative and quantitative productivity in their veterinary working environment

Empathy and burnout: how can educators help veterinary students develop balance for their future practice?

Presenting author: Kirsty Hughes, The University of Edinburgh, UK
Co-authors: Eva Joanna Alexjuk, Department of Counselling and Psychotherapy, School of Health in Social Science, University of Edinburgh, and Jessie Paterson, Rachel Whitington and Stacy Spielman, Veterinary Medical Education Division, The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, University of Edinburgh, UK

As part of an exploratory interdisciplinary project, students’ understanding of empathy to patients and clients in a number of healthcare professions were investigated. The research questions related to students’ understanding of empathy and how it is facilitated in their courses. In-depth interviews were held with five students, including two veterinary students, during which they were asked to define empathy and to give examples in day to day life and practice. Whilst the students recognised the potential benefits of client empathy, too much empathy for clients was seen as a way in which they could be overwhelmed and detrimental to their own mental wellbeing. Therefore lack of empathy to clients was seen as a potential protective measure for this. Time pressures were also seen as a barrier to expressing empathy, possibly leading to distress amid the pressure to move things on faster than they might like. They also highlighted a tension between concern for the animal’s welfare and empathy for the client and their circumstances. The veterinary students felt that empathy was not explicitly discussed in their curriculum but was inferred in certain places. Suggestions as to how to help prepare students for these challenges in practice were more explicit discussion in class about the benefits empathy can bring to their relationship with the client who is the gatekeeper to the animal’s welfare.
Introducing a mindfulness-based intervention to third-year UK veterinary students: a pilot study

**Presenting authors:** Eleanor Pontin and Avril Senior, The University of Liverpool, UK  
**Co-authors:** Julie Hanna, Karen Sheehan, The University of Liverpool, UK.

**Background**
Veterinary students experience high levels of psychological distress including anxiety, stress, perceived stress and depression. The inability to cope with demands of veterinary training has personal and professional consequences. Existing evidence shows mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) can reduce stress in students, but more research on how MBIs are introduced into the veterinary curriculum is required.

**Aims**
This pilot study had two aims:  
1) to examine stress, depression, anxiety, perceived-stress and wellbeing in third-year UK veterinary students;  
2) explore the introduction of a bespoke 4-week MBI into the veterinary curriculum.

**Method**
Mixed-methods design utilised questionnaires to measure stress, depression, anxiety, perceived stress and wellbeing. To explore perceptions of veterinary wellbeing and experiences of the MBI, qualitative feedback via focus groups was analysed using thematic analysis.

**Results**
A large proportion of students experienced high levels of stress, depression, anxiety and perceived stress. Three thematic areas from focus group data were: ‘Setting the scene for veterinary students and wellbeing – culture and context’; ‘Taking part and beyond- what it was like and what has the MBI done for me?’; and ‘Mindfulness for Veterinary students – reflections, challenges and making it happen’.

**Discussion**
Results have added to evidence for the rational of introducing mindfulness for veterinary students. Although experiences and outcomes of the MBI was positive, implementation into the veterinary curriculum is not without challenges.

**Conclusion**
This pilot study has provided clear recommendations to inform delivery of MBIs in the veterinary curriculum. Although this is now underway, further research into its effectiveness is required.

Embedding resilience training into the veterinary curriculum: a pilot study

**Presenting author:** Stacey Spielman, The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies (R(D)SVS), The University of Edinburgh, UK  
**Co-authors:** Rachel Whittington, Kirsty Hughes, Susan Rhind, Rob Ward, Victoria Macklin, Brian Mather, The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, The University of Edinburgh, UK

An intervention to embed resilience training into the core curriculum was piloted at the R(D)SVS using an online self-study course (‘Vet Sorted’) in the second year of the BVMS programme. The course included a two-hour introductory workshop, the aim of which was to emphasise the importance of the concept of resilience for the veterinary profession and for veterinary students.

The ‘Vet Sorted’ introductory workshop was mandatory for the students, and a short 100-300-word reflection on the course was required by the students upon its completion. A room was booked each week for the students to complete the online course, so time and space were protected in the timetable for the students, to help reinforce the inherent value of the course.

The workshop consisted of group exercises looking at the concepts of failure/success, and two bespoke videos, which were made by vet staff on campus to demonstrate the direct veterinary relevance. One video showed the frustration of trying to learn to place an IV cannula, and the other showed a busy night on call for a vet in practice.

Volunteers completed the Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al, 2008) at the start of the eight-week online programme.
with a second testing planned approximately three months after the finish of the online course, to see if there has been a measureable change in the participants’ resilience scores. General feedback will also be collected by survey from the entire year at the conclusion of the course (December 2016).

Start with the students: prevention better than cure?

Rosie Herrington, The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies (R(D)SVS), The University of Edinburgh, UK

I am a fourth-year veterinary student at Edinburgh and the president of our Veterinary Students’ Committee this year. One of my aims this year was to improve student welfare on campus. As part of this I organised for 40 students to undertake a two-day Mental Health First Aid Course in October this year – kindly funded by the Mind Matters Initiative. Having publicised this only once, over 50 people applied for a place on this course and sadly some students couldn’t have a spot. This to me proves that students are eager to learn about mental health and to be able to help their colleagues. 100% of students felt we should repeat it next year, and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive, for example, “I think it should be available to everyone – very useful,” and “I now feel more prepared to deal with people with mental health issues”. I believe that by improving access to courses like these for students, this could prevent the issues with mental health we are all so aware of in the veterinary profession. This course covered self-help as well as the signs of common mental health problems and some of the help which is available. Furthermore, an emphasis is placed on how to approach people you are worried about, and how to talk about suicide – skills which I think are invaluable both as students and graduates. If students are the future generation, by providing more mental health education at them perhaps we can create a happy generation.

Occupational stress and psychological wellbeing in UK veterinary surgeons

Elinor O’Connor, Alliance Manchester Business School, University of Manchester, UK

Aims and method
An interview study was conducted to identify sources of work-related stress experienced by a sample of vets in clinical practice in the UK (n = 18).

Results and discussion
Thematic analysis of the data allowed identification of the extent to which a range of aspects of veterinary work entail risk as sources of stress, with higher-risk features including workload and work-life conflict; working with animal owners; and staff management responsibilities. Additionally, the results of the study suggest that several participants had relatively high levels of evaluative concerns (eg Bieling et al, 2004), an individual difference variable that is associated with psychological distress (O’Connor, 2007), and which might interact with specific stressors experienced in veterinary practice to compromise vets’ psychological wellbeing.

Conclusions
The study provides a useful foundation for identifying effective stress management interventions for the veterinary profession. Follow-on work being completed includes a larger-scale, quantitative study of work-related stress and wellbeing in UK vets, and a comprehensive review of evidence regarding the efficacy of occupational stress interventions. Longer-term directions for research are presented.

Practice makes perfect? Skillful performance in veterinary work

Caroline Clarke, The Open University, UK
David Knights, The University of Lancaster, UK

Abstract
Veterinary surgeons are a comparatively underexplored occupation in organisation and social studies, and the professional literature focuses primarily on ‘wellbeing’, clinical practice and associated human-animal interactions. Studies tend
to be descriptive and statistical, leaving space for the qualitative analytical accounts that we provide from our extensive interviews and observations of vets. Our focus then is on the skilful performances of vets acquired ‘on the job’ as we ask ‘Is veterinary surgery an art that has to be learned to navigate the limitations of scientific discipline?’ The cliché of ‘practice makes perfect’ in our title has a question mark because, while many vets remain embedded in the disciplined ‘certainties’ and causal regularities within their training, in practice this ordered world is rarely realised, and they are faced with unpredictability, imprecision, uncertainty, indeterminacy, and problems for which the ‘perfect’ solution eludes them. This often results in their turning unrealistic ideals about what it means to be an expert back on themselves, thus generating doubt and insecurity for any failure. In analysing vets’ experiences, we pay particular attention to the masculine medical and anatomical models of science, where linear causal analysis is expected to provide orderly and predictable outcomes or ‘right’ answers to problems. In so doing we provide an insightful contemporary account of what it means to practise the art of imperfection in veterinary medicine.

Identity, environment and mental wellbeing

Elizabeth Armitage-Chan, Royal Veterinary College, University of London, UK.

Background
The first year of practice has been recognised as one of significance for veterinary mental health. The link between identity and mental wellbeing is increasingly recognised in psychology and medicine.

Aims and objectives
To explore early career veterinary professional identity.

Research questions
What is the early career veterinary identity, and how is it formed?

Method
Social media posts from 12 veterinarians in their first eight months of practice were analysed using critical discourse analysis. Identity was understood through narrative inquiry.

Results
Post-graduation, a patient-focused identity prioritises diagnosis and treatment, with frustration evident when context prevents this being realised. Significant events (euthanasia, being “in sole charge”) trigger identification that encompasses a broader conceptualisation of professional identity, particularly in relation to the client. While most participants developed awareness of the complex nature of the veterinary role, only some appeared to incorporate this into their identity. Those that did appeared to demonstrate a heightened sense of satisfaction when managing challenging situations, while similar challenges met with persistent frustration in others.

Discussion
Although the interpretive nature of the study limits generalisation, professional identity appropriate to employment environment, or being able to develop one’s identity in recognition of context, may enhance resilience and mental wellbeing. Individuals with a strong sense of identity that is incompatible with environmental constraints may need to change environment to prevent identity dissonance.

Conclusion
Professional identity had an impact on mental wellbeing. Educational strategies supporting appropriate identity development may confer benefits in graduate resilience and mental health.

Evaluating the acceptability and effectiveness of providing mindfulness based webinars for professionals in veterinary practice

Mike Scanlan, mental health nurse consultant Rosalyn Collings, University of Northampton, UK

Mindfulness-based intervention has been shown to be effective within several areas of mental health. The delivery of these has included internet-based short courses. There is very little research into the effectiveness of such delivery and none on the usage of interactive webinars. The current study aimed to assess the accessibility, uptake and effectiveness of a mindfulness based therapy delivered to over 1,000 professionals in veterinary practice around the UK. Course evaluation feedback was received from 143 respondents, whilst a survey measuring mindfulness awareness, coping self-efficacy, emotion regulation and wellbeing was completed by 94 respondents before the course and 11 at the end of the course.

Analysis focussed on the amount of engagement within the webinar and the reasons for not engaging as well as a potential mechanism for how raising mindfulness may impact on wellbeing.
Very few respondents completed the webinar live, due to their very busy schedules, with the majority watching the recordings. Survey results indicated that mindfulness awareness impacts wellbeing through coping self-efficacy but not emotion regulation. Wellbeing at the start of the course was significantly lower than previous normative data but due to very low data completion at the end of the course effectiveness could not be evaluated quantitatively. Discussion considers how to enhance response to mindfulness webinar evaluation, how to capture the aspects that work and do not work, and to consider the ethical debate around such high volume low intensity therapies which are increasing in popularity.

Poster presentation
Vocation, belongingness and balance: a qualitative study of veterinary student wellbeing

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An elevated risk for suicide among veterinarians has stimulated research into the mental health of the veterinary profession, and more recently attention has turned to the veterinary student population. This qualitative study sought to explore UK veterinary students’ perceptions and experiences of university life, and to consider how these may impact upon wellbeing. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 students, from a single UK school, who had been purposively selected to include male, female, graduate-entry, standard entry (straight from high school) and widening participation perspectives across all five years of the course. Three main themes were identified; a deep-rooted vocation, navigating belongingness and finding balance. Participants described a long-standing aim to become a veterinarian, with a determination reflected by often circuitous routes to veterinary school and little or no consideration of alternatives. Although some had been motivated by a love of animals, others were intrinsically interested in the scientific and problem-solving challenges of veterinary medicine. Most expressed strong feelings of empathy with animal owners. The issue of belongingness was central to participants’ experiences, with accounts reflecting their efforts to negotiate a sense of belongingness both in student and professional communities. Accounts also frequently reflected a degree of acceptance of poor balance between work and relaxation, with implications of a belief that this imbalance could be rectified later. Findings from this study support initiatives aiming to nurture a sense of collegiality among veterinary students as they progress through training and into the profession, as well as highlighting future avenues for research.
The Mind Matters Initiative (MMI) aims to improve the mental health and wellbeing of those in the veterinary team, including students, veterinary nurses, veterinary surgeons and practice managers.

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

The RCVS takes the mental health and welfare of members of the veterinary profession seriously, and its five-year, £1 million commitment to Mind Matters reflects this.

Mind Matters is chaired by RCVS Council member, and former President, Neil Smith. It is run day to day by its Director, RCVS Deputy CEO, Lizzie Lockett.

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 Veterinary Association
- British Veterinary Nursing Association
- Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons
- Veterinary Defence Society
- Veterinary Practice Management Association
- 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 five streams of activity:

**Learning and understanding best practice** – research within the veterinary profession, for example, into occupational stress factors; and among other related professions and private and public sector organisations that have successfully tackled similar issues

**Changing the culture** – a programme of communications activities to help generate a positive environment for discussion, reduce stigma, increase awareness and the ability to identify risks, and encourage help-seeking behaviour

**Personal support** – financial and other support for existing independent services, such as the independently run 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

**Supporting the supporters** – training and guidance for those who may be working or living with someone who needs assistance, in order to help supporters spot and understand signs of stress and mental illness, and help the person seek expert help

**Making changes** – working closely with the joint RCVS/British Veterinary Association Vet Futures project (vetfutures.org.uk) to help identify aspects of how the profession is structured and run (from student to retirement) that exacerbate stress and mental health problems – and consider how they may be addressed

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