



**vet
wellbeing
awards**

**Is your
practice the
happiest in
the country?**



Welcome to the Vet Wellbeing Awards 2018

We are proud to be launching the third year of the joint Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons Mind Matters Initiative (MMI) and Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons (SPVS) Vet Wellbeing Awards, which aim to recognise those veterinary employers of all shapes and sizes that are doing their utmost to ensure that the wellbeing of their team is considered in all aspects of the business.

For some time it had become clear that work-related stress and its fallout, for example, poor mental health and poor retention of veterinary professionals, were problems in the profession and that we needed to do more to talk about the positives of veterinary work and identify best practice in addressing the issues. After the Mind Matters Initiative was launched in 2015 it soon partnered with SPVS to develop and promote the awards.

When the awards were first launched in 2016 the aim was to recognise those practices with management systems and initiatives that motivate

and engage their staff and who can demonstrate their commitment to being a place to work in which the team feels well-supported.

Over the years the awards have continued to evolve, and this year we have placed an even greater emphasis on a more holistic approach to wellbeing by looking for evidence that the workplace is devoted to improving wellbeing, reducing work-related stress and creating a healthy and fulfilling atmosphere.

So we are looking for practices, protocols, policies and initiatives that address some of the tough issues around the veterinary workplace and veterinary work, as well as 'nice to have' initiatives such as fresh fruit bowls or free staff massages.

Wellbeing shouldn't be seen as a luxury that only practices with the most resources (whether that's in terms of money, people or time) can invest in - there are very practical and hard-headed reasons for all employers to improve wellbeing, as Dr Elinor O'Connor, a Senior Lecturer in Occupational Psychology at the

Alliance Manchester Business School details in an article in this booklet. Her research demonstrates that improving wellbeing has a positive impact on retention rates, reducing stress and improving team spirit. In fact, we are indebted to Elinor who has brought her wisdom, counsel and academic rigour to helping develop these awards.

Of course winning is great, but entering the awards in itself is a worthwhile exercise as it allows practices to benchmark where they are via the awards questionnaire. And the awards not only recognise those who are doing great things, but, by publishing the winners' stories, encourage other veterinary businesses to take steps to improve what they do.

We would like to thank the previous winners of the awards who have been enthusiastically helping us to promote good practice by agreeing to be interviewed, photographed and recorded talking about what a focus on wellbeing has meant to them and their teams. These recordings will be made available throughout the nomination period as RCVS podcasts,

which will be available to download from www.rcvs.org.uk/podcasts

We look forward to receiving your submissions for the Vet Wellbeing Awards and seeing what you do to ensure yours is a happy, healthy and fulfilling workplace. If you have any questions about the awards and their criteria please contact us on lizzie@vetmindmatters.org and nick.stuart@valevets.co.uk respectively.

Thank you,



Lizzie Lockett
RCVS CEO and
Director of the Mind
Matters Initiative



Nick Stuart MRCVS
Former SPVS
President and
Wellbeing Awards
Coordinator

Vet Wellbeing Awards

How to apply



The Vet Wellbeing Awards are now in their third year, and are run jointly by the Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons (SPVS) and the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons Mind Matters Initiative. These timely awards arose out of a desire to recognise the positive steps that veterinary

workplaces are taking towards the wellbeing of their employees. The Vet Wellbeing Awards are open to UK veterinary practices of all sizes. Every member of the team is encouraged to take part in entering. There are three awards presented, for best small practice, medium practice and large practice.

HOW TO APPLY

So if you feel your practice is a happy place to work, why not apply? You can apply via our online form, which can be found on our website: vetwellbeingawards.org.uk

We advise that, before applying for an award, you organise a team meeting to brainstorm, share ideas and generate feedback from as many team members as possible. We also recommend that you compile your set of answers in a Word document, and then copy and paste each answer into the online application form.

When completing your application, guidelines to follow are:

- 1. We recommend that a number of colleagues are involved in completing the application, rather than it being completed by one person.**
- 2. Some questions require a simple 'yes', 'no' or 'not applicable' answer, but most questions request brief details and a relevant example from your workplace. Your answers can be written in note or bullet form.**
- 3. When giving examples of what your practice does to support wellbeing, it is useful to describe the impact these actions have.**

- 4. Try to avoid re-using examples in your answers to different questions.**
- 5. Applications should be anonymous; please do not include the name of your practice or any details that might allow it to be identified. For reasons of confidentiality, please take care not to include names or identifying details of any individuals in your application.**

Prior to submission, it's beneficial to get extra feedback from different members of your team, or different departments, as colleagues may well have unique experiences of the practice. The more contributors, the better!

WELLBEING AWARDS CHECKLIST

The application form covers six key aspects of work that, if well-managed, can promote wellbeing and reduce the risk of work-related stress. These are:

1. Work demands

By its nature, veterinary work can involve potentially stressful experiences such as working with clients who may be upset or distressed, exposure to animal suffering, and managing cases in which taxing complications occur. Measures to help colleagues manage these demands can support wellbeing.



Vet Wellbeing Awards winners 2017

Winning the Vet Wellbeing Award was amazing... it gives us a sense of achievement and pride in our practice and in our work and team ethos.

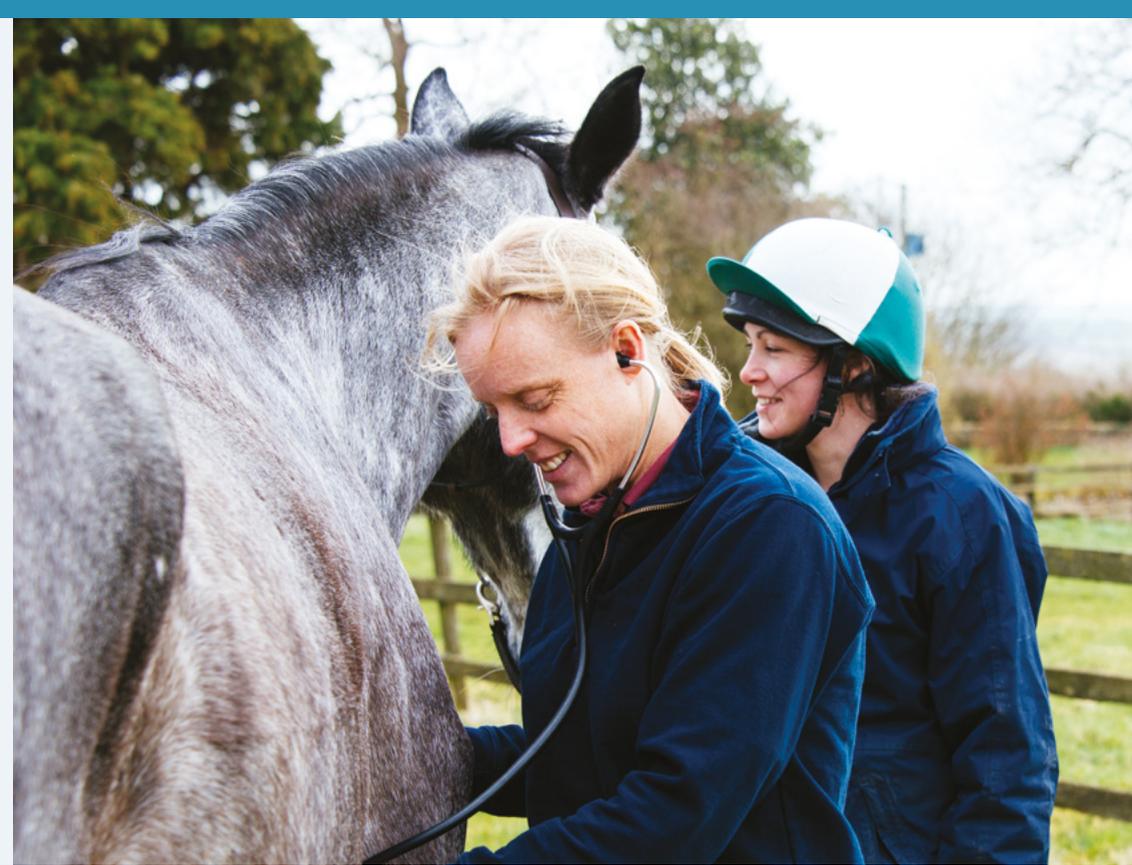
Maria Lowe, Viking Vets
(Winner, Medium Practice 2017)

It was a really fantastic boost to morale: being an ambulatory team, we have to work harder to ensure individuals feel supported and engaged. Even just working through the questions raised positive feedback from the team.

Sophie Aylett, Meadows Farm Vets
(Winner, Small Practice 2017)

It gave us an overwhelming sense of pride that we were recognised for taking care of each other, which is great for our team members and great for our bottom line too. We're still pinching ourselves!

Tracey Morley-Jewkes, Blacks Vets
(Joint winner, Large Practice 2017)



2. Workload and work scheduling

Providing all employees with the opportunity for regular breaks has been shown to reduce stress, and supporting and encouraging a positive work-life balance is essential. For example, introducing flexible-working can make a significant difference.

3. Relationships at work

Organising shared breaks for colleagues can create a sense of connection and increase wellbeing at work. Face-to-face interactions with colleagues tend to offer a deeper

sense of connection with your team and your work than communicating over email or text. Putting an effective bullying and harassment policy in place, of which all employees are aware, is important for wellbeing.

4. Career development

Induction support, supervision and regular appraisals all lead to increased positivity as colleagues feel nurtured within their roles. Providing training opportunities for employees can increase motivation. Providing extra training and ongoing support for employees can lead to greater

wellbeing and knowing that your team is there to support you is key.

5. Communication at work

Regular team meetings and updates help increase positive communication amongst employees. Providing all employees with the opportunity to comment on the way work is carried out leads to a greater sense of inclusion and wellbeing.

6. Promoting physical and psychological health at work

Promoting healthy-eating and good hydration can assist in mental wellbeing

for employees, as well as looking into stress-management initiatives. Keeping active during the day can also increase wellbeing, for example, encouraging group walks during lunch hours. This is also great for team bonding. Mindfulness and meditation at work is also an effective technique for increasing feelings of positivity and calm.

Each of these aspects of work is described in more detail in the application form, which will help you to identify examples of what your practice is doing to support wellbeing.

Case studies

White Cross Vets - 2016 Large Practice category winner

White Cross Vets, which employs 175 people across 16 sites around the country, invests in a wide range of initiatives to support its staff, starting from day one - every new team member receives a welcome phone call from the General Manager, Tim Harrison.

Everybody then has access to a number of both mental and physical health support systems including Simply Help, a service that subsidises private medical visits as well as providing a 24-hour helpline and up to six private counselling sessions. When the Mind Matters Initiative was running a series of eight mindfulness webinars with Webinar Vet, White Cross Vets made sure every single employee had access to the webinars to help open up the conversations about mental health and support people in managing their own mental health.

All team members also have four paid volunteering days a year, subsidised gym memberships, cycle-to-work schemes, childcare vouchers, and the ability to purchase additional holiday. That is not to mention some initiatives that are very personal to White Cross - at Easter, for



example, every team member's child receives a customised Easter egg, and everyone can take part in the internal currency system, the 'Alfie'. At the end of every month each staff member receives five Alfies which they can pass on to a colleague as a thank you or in recognition of a particularly good job. These can then be 'cashed in' as a donation to a charity of their choice, or in exchange for shopping vouchers - but the act of gratitude and support from a colleague as well as the sense of recognition is sometimes the most important factor.

Tim Harrison commented: "As a strategy we're trying to invest in our culture, we're trying to attract good people, keep good people, give a fantastic level of service to the clients, and off the back of that we believe a successful business will follow."

Valley Vets - 2016 Medium Practice category winner

Valley Vets in Cardiff is established across four branches and so puts a particular focus on communication and feedback across the whole veterinary team.

There is, for example, a commitment to relaying all positive comments made about the service provided by the practice, whether that be in the form of an email to all staff, a one-to-one with the relevant team member or highlighting positive Google reviews. Negative feedback is also shared, but anonymised and delivered in the context of a 'no-blame' culture - for Valley Vets, understanding what happens is the first step to learning from it and preventing a reoccurrence, rather than apportioning blame and therefore damaging staff morale and confidence.

This has led to a number of concrete changes - in one unfortunate case an operating surgeon wasn't aware of a cat's underlying complications and it died on the table, but this led to a number of proactive steps to prevent it occurring again: changing the rotas, introducing new anaesthetic forms, and creating a new pre-surgery checklist for operating surgeons.

Valley Vets also provided mental health training for all staff, running the training course both during the day and in



the evening to ensure everyone could attend. Not only did this provide people with the resources to support their own mental health, it also opened up the conversation so that the team felt more comfortable talking to each other and asking for help if needed.

There is also a very healthy emphasis on fun in the practice - there are cinema viewings, speedboat outings, and there was even once a weekend trip to Paris! And everyone always looks forward to a summer BBQ where the Directors buy, prepare, cook, host and wash up (as well as taking part in games of rounders and Twister).

Nichi Tanner RVN, Practice Manager, said: "Veterinary professionals want to get everything right, and then we struggle when, inevitably, we can't. So at Valley Vets we really encourage the team to chat with one another and to be open and honest about how they're doing.... It helps us cope with our everyday stresses."

387 Veterinary Centre – 2016 Small Practice category winner

387 Vets, a Walsall-based practice with 12 team members, works hard to ensure everyone feels comfortable and is able to support each other.

When it comes to career progression, for example, as a small practice there are fewer opportunities for promotion – 387 Vets therefore makes up for this in customised CPD opportunities to allow staff to progress and grow as professionals.

There is also a 'gratitude board' for any staff member to express their thanks towards a colleague, whatever the reason may be – from bringing in a cake to taking a stray animal home over the weekend. All team members were also asked to take personality tests to facilitate communication, with the results posted as a kind of 'cheat-sheet' to help people better understand their colleagues.

Rachel Duncan, Practice Manager, said: "The process wasn't seen as a personal criticism because we'd all gone through this proven analysis, so everything was talked about very objectively. The team members could go away, look at the way they functioned as part of a team, look at their growth points, and improve how they interacted with their colleagues."



There are also opportunities for catered support – when one particular team member was feeling overwhelmed she was given six one-on-one sessions with Carolyne Crowe, a veterinary surgeon who is also a performance and wellbeing coach, to help her better cope with workloads.

Everyone is also allocated a buddy when they first start to help mentor them, as well as there being bi-monthly meetings and 'significant event' meetings if there is an expected clinical outcome or an unforeseen death. As well as reducing compassion fatigue, this also helps to reduce any fear or blame culture by looking at these issues objectively and learning from them.

To further support the team everyone is given compassion and bereavement training – this resulted in some very practical changes including increasing the time for euthanasia appointments, always sending bereavement cards to clients, and providing a separate entrance to the building for those with pre-booked euthanasia appointments.

The case for enhancing wellbeing at work

Well-organised work in a good working environment has a positive impact on wellbeing. However, even when we normally enjoy our work, every job can be demanding and involve less pleasant experiences at times. If we perceive that the demands of our work are beyond our ability to cope, the result may be that we feel stressed. Stress is distinct from work demands that the person experiences as challenging but with which they believe they can cope; indeed, these can be motivating and help us to achieve our goals. Common sources of work-related stress across different occupational sectors and jobs include high workload, limited control at work, and poor relationships with colleagues.

It is well established that frequent or prolonged exposure to stressful situations at work can affect health and wellbeing. Research evidence shows that, in the shorter term, the effects of stress can include anxiety, sleep disturbance, and gastro-intestinal disorders, with outcomes in the longer term including depression and cardiovascular disease. In 2017, stress accounted for 40% of cases of work-related ill-health diagnosed by general practitioners in the UK (HSE). Given its implications for individuals' health and

wellbeing, the ethical case for addressing work stress is beyond question.

Aside from the benefits to individual workers when organisations seek to address work stress, there is a clear business case for enhancing wellbeing at work. Stress reduces individuals' engagement with their work, which has implications for performance and productivity. Stress is associated with increased absenteeism – in 2016-17, 12.5 million working days in the UK were lost to work-related stress (HSE). Work stress is also linked with increased employee turnover. All of these compromise organisational effectiveness.

Finally, under the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999), UK employers have a legal duty to protect the health and welfare of their workers, which includes managing hazards to psychological wellbeing. Organisations employing five or more people are required to have a written health and safety policy that identifies hazards to workers' health and wellbeing and sets out the actions taken to reduce risks.

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