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News in brief

Talking about veterinarians and mental health

Nearly three million Australians live with depression or anxiety every day. In recent years, we have begun to understand that veterinarians are proportionally over-represented in that number. Research shows that veterinarians have a suicide rate four times higher than that of the general population, but until recently no studies have examined the widespread effects of mental illness in the veterinary industry. Last year Murdoch University began a comprehensive study of the mental health issues facing veterinarians, with a nationwide anonymous survey. While the results of that study have yet to be published, we want to keep this important issue in the spotlight.

Over the next few issues, we'll be talking to veterinarians and mental health experts to discuss the pressures of the job, the emotional toll it can take on veterinarians, and where you can go for support. Even if you feel you're coping well, it's important that you recognise the signs of others who might be struggling with mental illness who may not know where to turn.

Mental health will be in the international spotlight this October: Australian Mental Health Week from 7 to 13 October 2018,

coinciding with World Mental Health Day on the 8th. A key aim is improving community awareness and interest in mental health and wellbeing.

If you or someone you know is experiencing mental health issues, you can call the following 24-hour counselling lines:

AVA Counselling Service on 1800 337 068

Lifeline on 13 11 14

MensLine Australia on 1300 789 978

beyondblue on 1300 224 636

Possible new marker for liver disease in dogs

Researchers at the University of Edinburgh's School of Veterinary Studies have teamed up with human doctors to develop a blood test to assess for early signs of liver disease in dogs, by measuring blood levels of the molecule miR-122¹. In humans this molecule is a marker for liver disease and found in high levels in affected individuals. The study involved 250 dogs and results showed those with liver disease that had significantly higher levels of miR-122 compared to healthy dogs or those with other pathology that did not affect the liver. Post the study, the team plans to launch a testing kit which will be available to veterinarians worldwide to assist in

catching early signs of liver damage and may allow fewer dogs to have to undergo more invasive liver biopsies. Lead veterinary researcher, Professor Richard Mellanby, hopes that the test will greatly improve outcomes by allowing veterinarians to make rapid and accurate diagnosis of liver disease.

Reference

1. Oosthuyzen W, Ten Berg PWL, Francis B et al. Sensitivity and specificity of microRNA-122 for liver disease in dogs. *J Vet Intern Med* 2018;1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jvim.15250>

Outbreak of African swine fever in China

In early August, China reported its first ever cases of African swine fever (ASF) within the country's pig population. It has since spread and has now been detected in areas more than 1000 kilometres apart. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has now issued a warning that the outbreak could spread to neighbouring countries within Southeast Asia and the Korean peninsula.

This disease outbreak is of serious concern as China is home to approximately half of the world's pig population, with an estimated 500 million pigs. Although the ASF virus does

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Cover photo

by Anne Jackson.



not pose a direct threat to human health, it can have a major impact on all those involved in the pig farming industry. The virus can be devastating with possible mortality rates of up to 100% in infected pigs; there is currently no known treatment or vaccination against the disease. ASF is easily transmitted between pigs via direct contact of bodily fluids, and fomites pose a significant threat to the spread of the disease. It is present in the tissues of infected pigs and according to the FAO's Chief Veterinarian, Juan Lubroth, the movement of dried or cured pork products is the likely route of the virus spreading between parts of China, rather than the movement of live pigs.

Given its multiple routes of transmission and lack of treatment options, immediate action is required to eliminate it from China's pig population as soon as possible. In the month following the initial detection of the disease, the FAO reports that the Chinese government have already culled more than 24,000 pigs in four provinces in an attempt to control the spread of the disease. Further investigations and time will tell how widespread this new outbreak will be.

Do household pets pose potential pest problem

The ABC has raised the question of whether it is only a matter of time before a household pet becomes the country's next pest problem. Australia has a terrible track record when it comes to introduced feral species, the effect of which has devastated native wildlife, and cost the agricultural industry hundreds of millions of dollars in damage each year.

A US study published in the *Journal of Applied Ecology* found that the number of introduced reptiles and amphibians has risen worldwide, and the pet trade provided the dominant pathway for the spread of these new species.

The authors found that animals that were imported in high quantities and had a relatively large adult mass, or were long-lived, were more likely to be released into the environment by owners. Burmese pythons fit this description, and now wreak havoc on native species in the Florida Everglades. By the time the US government banned the importation of the species in 2012, the population was out of control. Australian border security

intercepts the majority of exotic species illegally imported, however some have still slipped through. A boa constrictor was found on the Gold Coast in 2015, a population of smooth newt in Melbourne in 2011, and this year a pair of captive red-eared slider turtles were discovered in Adelaide.

It is not only illegally-kept species escaping or being released by irresponsible owners which pose a pest threat to Australia. Commonly kept legal species, such as Indian ringneck parrots, also pose a threat of becoming established if released into the right conditions. The birds are declared pests in Western Australia due to their known effects on agriculture in other parts of the world. Queensland takes it a step further having strict bans preventing ownership of rabbits and ferrets because of their risk of establishing in the wild. As veterinarians it is our responsibility to spread the message of responsible pet ownership. Along with increased government measures, it's all we can do to prevent our large list of pest species getting any longer.

Ben Telfer and Stephen Reinisch

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Dr Paula Parker, President

Mental health; What does it mean for our profession?

Last month, we talked about the importance of our profession for the strategic priorities of the AVA. October brings a focus on one aspect that underpins our profession: our mental health and wellbeing.

The wellbeing of our profession is also high on the international veterinary agenda. Discussions over the last year have focused on ensuring that across the globe, members of our profession have access to help when and where we need and also that we have the tools, education and resources to thrive. Internationally, veterinary organisations are looking to the World Health Organisation's Definition of Mental Health:

a state of wellbeing, in which every individual realises their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to their community to guide their work.

In last month's column, I touched on the collaboration of our profession around the globe and Veterinary Professional Wellness is no different. There is significant sharing of resources, information and expertise across our sister and international veterinary organisations. For example, several of our leading members are a part of the World Small Animal Veterinary Association Professional Wellness Group.

Our Board also discussed the wellness of the Australian veterinary profession at our recent meeting. Like our international colleagues, we discussed the structured support systems available through the AVA including the AVA Mentoring Scheme,

the Counselling Service, the AVA HR Support Line and the AVA Benevolent Fund. We continue to receive great feedback on the Mental Health First Aid Course, and we are well on the way to our goal of having a trained team member in every veterinary business in Australia. Monika Cole touches on this a little later in the issue.

The 2019 Education program will soon be in your inboxes, and a huge thank you must go to all the staff and members who have dedicated time and effort to ensure that through our programs, we have access to the technical, leadership and communication skills we need to thrive in our varied and challenging environments.

What we need to thrive can look different for everyone and can change as we and the world around us changes. Later in this issue, 'Advice for young veterinarians entering the industry' touches on the experience of recent graduates. No conversation about drought and drought management is complete without due consideration for the toll this can take on the mental health of the whole community. One of the greatest things about our profession is our ability to come together as a tribe to solve problems and contribute to our communities. The contribution of our members to the drought recovery efforts and the story of Pets in the Park bring this to life for me.

Like everything, there is also a deeply personal and individual side to our mental health and wellbeing. We each have our own essential ingredients and routines that need to be in the mix to realise our potential, cope with the normal stresses of life and work productively. After all, nothing flows from an empty glass.

My checklist looks like this:

- Simplified, sorted, streamlined: I hate clutter; in my mind, in my house, in my calendar, in my bank accounts. Things that are not both beautiful and useful don't have a place in my home or my life. Less in, less out, less to maintain, more time and a clear mind for the good stuff.
- Exercise. I have learnt through trial and error that the type of exercise matters a lot. While it won't be everyone's cup of tea, for me, more mental peace can be found during a long hard run or in a pair of cleats than on a yoga matt. #runtimes.
- Positive vibes only on social media: social media can be a tricky place for many of us, and this is highlighted later in this issue. My preferred social platform is Instagram (@avapresident); it lets me curate my feed so that it looks like my own personalised magazine. If anyone is bringing the negative vibes, then I unfollow them. Equally, if I'm having one of those 'negative Nancy' days, I stay off. If I only want positive vibes on social media, then that is all I want to put out too.
- Plan my day, week, month, quarter and year. It is great to have things to look forward to: holidays, catch-ups with colleagues, friends and family, exciting events, new capsule wardrobes. The thing is, they rarely happen if you don't put some effort into planning them.



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Anne McCotter, Acting CEO

Using membership to add value to your business



Most members would have heard the term “spend as much time working on your business as you do working in it”.

As this is the time of year when most business's start to reflect on the last 12 months and look ahead, it's timely to remind you how your membership gives you access to extend your business operations with the resources, tools and services you have available to you through your membership. In this issue of the AVJ we highlight best business practices to assist members with implementing their practice and individual plans.

At AVA we spend much time reviewing and continuously improving the services we offer to members and are always looking for new initiatives that will assist you in your practice. To ensure that these services are top of mind as you plan your business needs for the year ahead it's opportune to share some of the services available through membership: from Human Resources, education through to Insurances, Business Advisory and technical resources including AVA and international veterinary medical and business journals.

This year at AVA we have focused particular attention to our Human Resources service for members to ensure that we maximise value for our members. This service provides for your HR needs and has advice ranging from recruitment and HR policies right through to issues that employees may be facing. An HR service plays an important role in any organisation's ability to operate successfully. This year we are enhancing this service to further complement new features including access to a payroll services, on-site consultancy to manage any larger HR projects and extensions to our already popular wellness programs. In addition, we are busy building an education program that will assist members who are currently enjoying a career break and are looking to refresh their clinical and non-clinical skills before returning to the workforce. Mentoring our young veterinarians is a key initiative for the AVA and later in this edition Monika Cole explains the resources, tools and mentoring that we have available to young veterinarians entering the workforce.

Insurance is a critical element for any business and we recognise that members should always get the best advice possible. Every second month we meet with our long-standing partner Guild Insurance to continuously review and share information that is up-to-date for members including providing education around risk and information with the use of case studies. This year Guild has focused on refining and improving products for small animal practice and we are pleased that these will be launched to the membership in the coming months.

To round off our business theme, October is also the month we hold our annual Veterinary Business Group Summit. This year the Summit will focus on managing a veterinary practice in today's competitive environment and will tackle the big issues and barriers around growing a sustainable veterinary business into the future. We look forward to seeing you at the Royal Pines Resort on the Gold Coast from 28-30 October 2018.



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Hanging tough in the drought

With south-east Australia in the grip of one of the worst droughts to ever hit the country, we caught up with Dr Scott Parry of NorthWest Vets to see how veterinarians, producers, and the government are dealing with the extreme conditions.

How do you help your clients when it comes to managing the drought?

A big focus for our business is helping clients with decision-making. Producers often struggle to make decisions in these conditions as they're often too emotionally invested to make objective decisions around their livestock. We really encourage our clients to think ahead, make the decisions now that will help them 6 to 12 months down the line. Some of these things might not be obvious to a producer who's looking at his stock every day. We try to help them make decisions around which animals to keep and which to market.

Pregnancy testing has been a big focus for us over the last 18 months as the season has continued to deteriorate. It allows producers to make good decisions and maintain optimal herd structure to handle the drought. Clients need to be calving the right animals at the right time while still retaining a steady cash flow. And while we are there doing pregnancy testing, we can also help producers identify other structural faults in animals that make them higher risk, less desirable animals that are better off out of the herd.

We do a significant amount of nutritional advisory work, both through our business and in conjunction with the Local Lands Services (LLS) veterinarians. In this capacity, we provide advice relating to drought feeding and supplementation.

Recently we have been dealing with a lot of enquiries around 'funny feeds' - unusual feed sources producers wouldn't normally have to use. Things as diverse as oranges, almond hulls, sweet potatoes and grape marc have come into play as routine feed commodities become unavailable or unaffordable. Farmers are pretty good at feeding normal feeds, but with these 'funny feeds' they sometimes need help. We don't do a lot of individual sick animal work during drought, but it's still important in the context of the whole herd. Sometimes that one sick animal can be the 'canary in the cage' - an indicator of wider problems such as infectious diseases, nutritional issues, and toxicities that may be emerging. We need to recognise the issue in a single animal before we can recognise it at a herd level.

With regard to animal welfare, do you see the 20:80 rule - where 20% of producers have 80% of the problems - and how do you manage that?

Look, when we talk about drought-related animal welfare cases, it's important to acknowledge the LLS veterinarians. And before we go any further, can I just encourage private practitioners to develop good relationships with their local LLS veterinarians and staff. They are a fantastic resource. Just drop in and have a cuppa with them sometime and make yourself known. For those who don't know, the LLS is basically a free service to NSW ratepayers and they field a lot of these tough welfare and animal health calls. Being an LLS vet during drought means that you don't get to do the feel-good cases like vaccinating puppies and delivering cute calves. Every call you get as an LLS vet is from someone with a significant animal health problem;

nutritional, disease and welfare issues. The recent announcement by the NSW government of funding for euthanasia of livestock in extreme cases means these LLS veterinarians will most likely be the ones administering it; the mental stress that this will entail should not be underestimated. There is absolutely no joy in that job.

In our practice, we work closely with the LLS so we get to see things from their side of the fence and we have the utmost respect for the work this group does, especially during drought. But in our capacity as private veterinarians, we are fortunate in that we are doing mostly routine, management work for clients who have kept their livestock and themselves in relatively good shape. They've taken the proactive steps to adjust their stocking rates, feed effectively and keep on top of disease control. Having said that, you still find yourself from time-to-time having to have that tough conversation with a client about how they are handling animal welfare in their production system.

Are the government and drought bodies doing enough to help?

Firstly, I'd like to say that by-and-large, I believe drought charity bodies are well-intentioned, and they do a lot of good for a lot of people. However, I do have some concerns that 'buy a bale of hay' style programs have the potential to distort feed commodity markets. For clients who are proactively managing the drought situation themselves and are committed to feeding their core breeder and feeder stock properly. These people are operating in the same feed commodity marketplace as the 'buy a bale' people. But the cost of that bale of hay is likely inflated by market forces that include these 'buy a bale' groups. At the other end of the spectrum, there's the risk that these schemes act as a band-aid measure and just prop up producers

Producers often struggle to make decisions in these conditions as they're often too emotionally invested to make objective decisions around their livestock.

who are running poor operations and whose main drought preparation has been to 'hope for rain.' A few free bales of hay might keep them going for a bit longer, but it won't alter the underlying problem of poor management and may well perpetuate ongoing animal welfare problems. I just ask that drought welfare bodies think very carefully about how they choose to spend their dollars and be conscious of the potential for their actions to have unintended consequences.

The government is in a tough spot; they're reacting to a knee-jerk media and constituent outcry, for a problem that realistically requires long-term planning. What I'm trying to say is that government money could be better spent in the good times, preparing for the next dry spell. Provide financial incentives for farmers to invest in fodder storage, delivery, conservation infrastructure and improving pastures. By and large, producers and other rural businesses don't want handouts, they want to be given aid that helps them help themselves. But that's a tough sell to get the politicians, public, and media interested in investing money in agriculture in times of plenty when it looks like we don't actually need it. So, we end up in the current cycle where we wait until it's a raging drought and respond with the traditional reactive drought relief measures. Inevitably this financial outlay will be far less cost and outcome effective than if it was invested pre-emptively in active drought mitigation.

How do you think veterinarians can respond and contribute to tough situations like this?

There are a couple of things that I think need to be considered here. Firstly, it's important to see what you can do to help yourself. People are very quick to say, "Why doesn't the AVA or government do something?" I just don't think that helps. The AVA, the government, and other bodies can't solve all of these problems. Sure, they can help, but it's what veterinarians themselves do on the ground and at a local community level that's more important.

One of the things that we as a practice are passionate about is being involved in the wider community. Success as a rural vet practice isn't just about what happens in the consult room or in the cattle yards. Being an active member of the local community says a lot about you as a practice and creates a lot of goodwill within the community. Many of our staff are involved in the Coonamble Raindance at the moment – check it out on Facebook! It's a whole community thing and all about people getting together during tough times and taking the chance to socialise and talk. The benefits for mental health are enormous. By getting involved, not only are you helping others but at a personal and business level you get it back in spades.

So, is there an answer to stop this cycle of reaction, panic and then inaction during the good weather periods?

I don't have the answer to that question. But I do believe that if we are to avoid repeating past mistakes, the rural industries need to take control of the drought management conversation.



Dr Scott Parry

We have to approach it from a climate change, animal welfare, and environmental sustainability perspective. That way we are far more likely to engage politicians and urban dwellers.

Then there's a chance that more proactive drought management programs will get a leg-up. And programs like that will have a much better chance of making a difference in the long-term.

As veterinarians, we need to keep engaging with these big issues as well. While we're not the single most important part of the process, we are still a vital part of a large and complex supply chain that involves food and fibre production, the environment, politics, and economics. For us to remain relevant, we need to keep advocating for practical change that is grounded in science. As someone said to me recently, "If you're not at the table, you're on the menu". Veterinarians need to continue to speak up for change that will help us, our clients and our communities – and we can only do that with a seat at the table.

James Ramsden



Introducing... Susan Bibby of Myvet Strathfieldsaye



Dr Susan Bibby

In our new column 'Introducing...' we speak to a different veterinarian each month, to spotlight the unique and passionate individuals that make up our diverse profession. This month we caught up with Susan Bibby, veterinarian and clinic manager at Myvet Strathfieldsaye in Bendigo, Victoria. Susan started her career as a poultry vet, which she cites as instrumental in her subsequent success as the owner of a mixed animal practice.

We asked Susan to tell us a bit about her background.

I graduated in 2000, and at that time the Department of Agriculture had recreated the concept of 'the cadetship.' It meant that students would be paid to study, with the understanding that they'd go on to work for the Department. I won one of these and found myself as a government vet once I'd graduated. The program was fantastic as it supported me through vet school.

And from there how did you get into chickens and what was the appeal?

There was a fair bit of disruption while I was there at the Department, labs closing down, reduced opportunities, and I didn't see this as a long-term future for me. I was approached to join a private poultry consultancy. Jobs like that were as rare as hen's teeth. It turned out to be a

fantastic career move. I think I've worked with every type of production bird, and after a few years I applied to a primary breeding company in Scotland. This is where the genetic selection program for meat chickens worldwide is taking place and was the experience of a lifetime. It gave me access to amazing scientists, and leading genomics technology. Before genomics we could only use phenotypic measures to assess which chicken would have the better genes – two chickens could have the same phenotype but one would have a superior gene – for example for an important welfare trait such as disease resistance, and we'd never know. Genomics changed all that, and now we can zero in on the 'snp' (single nucleotide polymorphism) that we want. This was the best job I've had.

Why then change?

I moved back to Australia and had a disagreement with an employer; it was technical, professional, and ethical. I had a bit of a midlife crisis, which I'm now happy to discuss. But I went through a tough time. I thought I'd never work in poultry again, and for someone dedicated to building a career, and really enjoying the work, this was devastating. But over time I realised it wasn't the end, I still do poultry work today, and really enjoy it. But I had to do something else to make ends meet, and fortunately I was approached by friends with a vet laboratory who wanted to start a mixed animal clinic. They asked if I'd like to get involved.

What was the learning from this disruption to your career?

You'll always learn from something that goes wrong. And I learnt that while it might seem like the end of the road, it's not. It never is. As veterinarians we have amazing skills in all sorts of areas that we can use in all sorts of ways.

How did you apply this experience in your new role?

In being part of large organisations as a poultry vet, I learned how to work with other people. Applying this to practice, probably the most important lesson was to surround myself with great people. You can't run a business well by yourself, there are so many areas of expertise required, which means the team will always win. Some of the key people for me are my bookkeeper, accountant and mentors – other veterinarians with way more experience than I had.

What do you think is the greatest issue facing veterinarians in 2018?

It's people management; both how we recruit and how we manage our teams going forward. New grads have different expectations, they work to live, not the reverse. And that is ok. This is a challenge for our industry, but I prefer to think about embracing that as an opportunity to change the way we manage our people to build healthy businesses and healthy staff.



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Alison Lambert on 'what vets are avoiding'

Back by popular demand after well-received appearances at the 2018 AVA Conference and last year's Veterinary Business Group Summit, Associate Professor Alison Lambert will be a keynote speaker at the upcoming VBG Summit in Queensland, with the provocatively titled talk 'So what are we avoiding?' James Ramsden caught up with Alison to get the scoop.

How is 'avoidance' related to 'building your future today,' the theme of this year's summit?

When I think about 'avoiding' I think it relates to change; we don't embrace change as a profession. Telemedicine is a good example, we're still arguing about it. Why not just start with it? Embrace it. If we do that we'll learn, make mistakes, learn more, get better and have a strong chance of leading in this new area. If we keep on as we have been, someone else will take up the opportunity, they won't be vets, and our ongoing involvement becomes less than certain.

Looking back, there are many veterinary activities that have been difficult to change. Anaesthetics, evolving from thiol to gas, took a lot of time. Introducing pain management didn't happen overnight. We spend a lot of time analysing and going around in circles, particularly when it comes to big issues facing vet business.

Fees are something that we seem to talk about a lot, are we avoiding this issue?

Yes, we're going around in circles on fees. There are a couple of issues here; we need to put our fees up, seriously rethink margins on drugs, stop worrying about selling food – I don't mean prescription diets – and start looking at what consumers want, and by that I mean subscription models.

Putting fees up is a no-brainer. We do need leadership here – either from the member associations or a large corporate – but if a large chunk of vets put their fees up, everyone else would follow, and it would become the new norm. What has been happening is a lot of hand-wringing, and little movement on fees, which doesn't do any good for any of us.

What is it about vets or vet businesses that means we keep going around in circles on these key issues?

It's a good question, I don't know the answer but I do know what I see; vets are good at dealing with life-threatening situations that need to be dealt with in 'the now.' What vets are not good at is strategic thinking and having the discipline to run a business. There's also the emotional load carried by many young vets, I see these people feeling the weight of decisions much more than is healthy. It's fine to put an animal on long-term pain relief but doing that to avoid having to face a more difficult emotional decision like euthanasia is not being effective.



Associate Professor Alison Lambert

These are things that I see, which are contributing to poor business outcomes, and poor mental health in the industry.

We need to own our futures, and to do that we need to take a risk and make a decision. We're not taught business skills as students, but those exposed to business over time realise to be successful, you need to try stuff. Failing is part of that, and it's okay! You make a mistake and then you fix it and move onto the next thing.

One of the real challenges for clinics is getting staff, some say it's almost impossible to find new vets at the moment – what can you say about that?

It is hard to get staff and this problem is not limited to the veterinary industry. As a society if we'd said 30 years ago "Oh look, there's a shift in community expectations, the role of men and women and this will affect how people want to work, let's start planning for this," we would likely be in much better shape.

In some countries, like Scandinavia, the attitude to child care is that both men and women can be involved, this puts much less pressure on women in the workplace. Compare that to Australia where most people who take time off to look after their young kids are women. It's changing in the UK, legally both men and women can take time off for kids, but culturally, it's still women who do the bulk of the heavy-lifting. And so, vet clinics suffer, as most of the team are women. Oh, and if I hear another person talk about the 'feminisation of the workforce,' I'll scream! Feminisation is a process that happens to an organism, having more women working, that's not the same thing!

Other solutions include flexible working hours. As a manager, having an understanding that you have x number of hours a week to fill and just do it however you can. The old mindset is 'I need full-time vets or ... nothing,' and when you can't find full-time vets, you go around in circles.

Are corporates something we need to pay more attention to as well?

If you mean by 'corporate', a group with a large number of hospitals and staff delivering vet services, I don't have a problem with these groups. They fulfill a need in the market and in the UK they represent about 60% of all clinics now. What I do have an issue with is their ability to influence any conversation with government, because they're investors, banks and shareholders, not vets, and their motivations are different. This could have profound impacts for the profession, potentially diminishing the role that vets play.

It's likely that with changing consumer demands, technological improvements, and a focus on running a business effectively, the veterinarians in these businesses will become increasingly marginalised. It's not out of reasonable thought that vets could have a much more minor role in the future.

The converging trends that are driving this are consumers who want 'pet care,' not 'vet care.' They'll get it from anywhere as long as it's convenient and it works, it's the Uber model. Then we've got the emergence of artificial intelligence, that will provide most of the diagnostic work that vets used to do. Pet stores like Petco in the US are now providing full pet care services which are mostly based around products and non-vet services, and the vet stuff is stuck in there as a small part of the puzzle. And if we look at Norway where it's illegal to desex your pet, that's a massive hit to vets in terms of lost revenue.

But instead of complaining about these changes and going around in circles, the answer lies in applying the full-force of our intellect to these issues. By coming together, we'll find a way through, even if we do have to make some mistakes along the way.

The VBG Summit is on from October 28th - 30th at the RACV Royal Pines Resort on the Gold Coast. Early bird tickets are available until September 10th. Register at www.eiseverywhere.com/vbg18.

We need to own our futures, and to do that we need to take a risk and make a decision.



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KNOWLEDGE

Advice for young veterinarians entering the industry

Stephen Reinisch graduated in 2016 and now works in a busy small animal practice in suburban Melbourne. He has some advice for new graduates about the big leap into the veterinary industry.

For many of us, the journey to become a veterinarian is one that started years ago as a childhood dream. Back then becoming a vet seemed like a simple task; you just had to do well in high school, go to university, and then you were a vet. Little did we realise, that for some of us, the road to becoming a vet was going to be far from straightforward. It can involve rejection, many years of additional study in different degrees, moving interstate or even internationally, accumulating significant financial debt, and potentially change the whole course of your life in the process. But no matter how long it took, or what we had to do to become veterinarians, we've all made it to the point where we have achieved that dream, and it's something that we should be proud of.

Being a vet is not an easy job, and that is something you will realise very quickly.

After the excitement of graduation has worn off, it's time to start your first job as a fully qualified veterinarian. This can be and often is a daunting and stressful time for many new graduates.

Gone are the days of being a student where you were there to observe and assist, all while trying to hide your internal panic when the vet would ask an obscure question you didn't know the answer to.

Now you are the one who provides advice to clients and determines what is done to their animal. The learning curve when starting your first job is steep. For the first few months you'll find yourself seeing new things regularly, and often feeling like you're way out of your depth (particularly when trying to manage complicated cases which don't want to stick to the textbook examples you've been taught.) But you'll soon realise the famous saying 'common things happen commonly' is definitely true and you'll quickly develop your own approach to cases, so that they become almost second nature.

Being a vet is not an easy job, and that is something you will realise very quickly. Not only is it technically and mentally demanding, it can also have a big effect on your personal life.

Working long hours as well as evenings and weekends is commonplace for many veterinarians. For some this schedule can work well and getting a midweek day-off is a bonus, but for others it can become isolating and put strain on your relationships with those outside of the industry. It's not uncommon to miss out on social events because you're working that particular weekend or having to cancel dinner plans on short notice due to a last-minute emergency, or because you're simply too tired after a draining day at work.

Having others around you to support you through veterinary cases is important, but more importantly having someone you can talk to about the issues and challenges we face in our industry is essential when starting out as a new veterinarian. I have been fortunate to start my first job in a supportive clinic. Unfortunately, there are many new graduates who aren't as lucky. It is possible to flourish in such environments, but others may struggle. It's in these situations where communicating with your peers is essential. It can be challenging staying in touch with friends from university - we're all veterinarians after all! Finding a time when everyone is free is like winning the lottery, but these people are invaluable to have around, and you can be sure anything you're feeling about the job, they've felt too. Joining the AVA Mentor program is another great way to create connections within the industry, and form a relationship with an experienced, impartial vet who is there to support you, and answer any questions without judgement or bias.

As with any career, your veterinary skills and knowledge will improve with experience, and this takes time to develop. For many young veterinarians, your clinical skill set is often considered the key factor when determining how you're progressing since graduation, and whether you are at the 'expected' level.



Students attending the AVA Conference

How AVA can help

Given how difficult it is to become a veterinarian, the profession is filled with high-achievers and people who are used to being the best of the best. It's this competitive drive and the expectations, whether realistic or not, which we put on ourselves that can be our downfall in the early years and a great source of stress and dissatisfaction with the profession.

Spending hours after work researching and contemplating all the decisions you've made on a case you were unsure of instead of asking for advice from those around you, or racing against the clock to complete a desexing as fast as the vet 20 years your senior, may feel like it's what you should be doing to push yourself to become a 'better' vet – but are you happy in the process? It's not that we shouldn't strive to improve but we should set realistic goals and allow yourself to celebrate your achievements, no matter how small.

We all became veterinarians because we thought it would be a career that we would enjoy doing, so making sure we're happy with our job should be the top priority. There is no shame in asking for help when it becomes too much, we've all been in the same situation and know how it feels. Everyone is different and we all enjoy different aspects of being a veterinarian. Some of us live for surgery, while others love the challenge of a complex medical case. There are even veterinarians out there who enjoy consulting and interacting with clients above all else. Some people discover their passion quickly and stick with it their entire careers, while others can take years and move through various areas, before finding the one they enjoy the most. The journey to become a veterinarian didn't end when we received that piece of paper, it was only the first step in a lifelong adventure.

Stephen Reinisch

We spoke to Monika Cole, AVA's Recent Graduate and Student Program Manager about what resources are available to young veterinarians entering the workforce.

What is the mentor service, and who is it available to?

Our Mentoring Service is available to all final year university students who are about to graduate, as well as new graduates up to four years out. The program runs for 12 months during which time students are matched with veterinarians who have a minimum of three years veterinary experience.

How does the service help young veterinarians?

AVA mentors volunteer their time to help with career development and professional challenges, and they also act as a sounding board for personal reflection that helps build resilience. We hope to establish a mutually beneficial professional relationship that creates a positive transition to the veterinary profession and highlights the collegiality that is so profound in this industry. We believe the service helps young veterinarians to understand that they are not alone out there; we have their backs.

What advice would you give to a young vet who is struggling in their new role?

Talk to someone, remember, you are not the first person to struggle and you won't be the last. Try to keep an open mind – viewing the situation from another perspective is a great way to turn a struggle into an advantage. That is what your mentor can help you define.



We are social beings and in order to thrive we need to stay in touch with our tribe. It is easy to isolate ourselves in the belief that we alone have all the answers. Get involved with your local community, better yet, come to an AVA event; there are 99 plus a year – you won't feel lonely!

Outside of a mentor, where can young veterinarians go if they need to talk about the pressures of the job?

Mentors are not counsellors, but they are trained to help provide you with the best resources if something is outside their expertise. The AVA provides confidential HR advice and telephone counselling. Look at counselling from the lens of having a chat with a coach, to gain a different perspective. It isn't as scary as you think and feels quite liberating to unload with someone who doesn't know you at all.

AVA Counselling Service
1800 337 068

AVA HR Service
1300 788 977

Ben Telfer

From the desk of Dr Mark Schipp

As Australia's Chief Veterinary Officer, it's important to me to maintain communication with the veterinary profession. It gives me an opportunity to tell you about my work and the activities going on within the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources (the Department) to support Australian producers and veterinary services. I also appreciate hearing from the broader veterinary community about what's happening in your world and what issues we can work on together. Thanks to Dr Paula Parker, the AVA President, for the opportunity to communicate with you via the AVJ.

Looking forward

As we farewell to a cold and dry winter in Canberra I'm looking forward to the onset of spring and a number of important events we have coming up over the next few months and into 2019. Scanning the environment, or foresight, for emerging animal health issues is a crucial part of the Department's role. We analyse issues from a range of perspectives and use the results to inform our planning, policy advice and strategy. We seek to identify significant emerging issues before they become critical whilst we have the opportunity to develop a range of options and design a considered and effective response.

Recently the Department has been closely monitoring the outbreak of African Swine Fever (ASF) in China. This outbreak is concerning because it's the first report of ASF in Asia, outside of Russia, and is significant because China produces about half the world's pig population, approximately 500 million pigs per year. There have been a number of detections of ASF in China and some of these infected areas are more than 1000km apart. This raises concerns about the degree of spread of the disease within China and fears it will spread further in Asia. The ASF outbreak will have significant impacts for Chinese pig production and international demand for pork meat. In Australia we have strict biosecurity controls for ASF but we are observing this event as it presents both risks and opportunities for the Australian pig industry and our biosecurity system.


At the OIE

In the last two weeks of September I will be travelling to Europe to attend two OIE meetings, my first since I was elected President of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) World Assembly in May. On 17 September I will open the 28th Conference of the OIE Regional Commission for Europe in Tbilisi, Georgia. From there I will travel to Paris to attend and Chair the September OIE Council meeting on 25 – 27 September. The key topic for me at both of these meetings is commencing development of the OIE's 7th strategic plan. This plan will need to maintain the momentum and achievements of the OIE's 6th strategic plan (2016 – 2020) and sustain them in the long term.

Achievements of the OIE's 6th strategic plan are:

- better identification of strategies – the OIE now has well defined and supported strategies for antimicrobial resistance, vaccine banks and monitoring the implementation of its international standards through the OIE Observatory
- a project to improve the World Animal Health Information System so that animal health information is easily accessed, shared and understood
- internal reform to the OIE so it is better prepared to fulfil the expectations of member countries and help them achieve their objectives.





I will be encouraging broad contribution to the 7th strategic plan to make sure it truly represents the future directions and issues important to us as individual countries. From an Australian perspective, we want to see a focus on encouraging greater adoption and implementation of international standards, increasing member participation in OIE governance and processes, and positioning the OIE to be a strong global voice on behalf animal health and veterinary services in important global discussions such as those on antimicrobial resistance, climate change and food security.

On AMR

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a significant focus for me here at home too, as we work to position Australia's agricultural sector to both contribute to controlling the spread of AMR while ensuring they have a strong voice in the development of national AMR-related regulation and policy.

On 22 August we hosted an AMR workshop in Melbourne which brought together representatives from the AVA, veterinary schools and boards, livestock and associated industries, state and territory CVOs and others to refine an animal sector AMR plan for Australia over the next five years. We were fortunate to have the Chief Medical Officer Professor Brendan Murphy join me in opening the workshop. Later in the year we are going to visit a chicken farm together!

The plan will support the second national AMR strategy. The first and current strategy, its implementation plan and progress report along with other resources can be found here: <http://www.amr.gov.au>

Back to looking forward

In continuing the theme of looking forward, watch out for activities and communications on World Rabies Day which is coming up on Friday 28 September. Every 15 minutes someone in the world, usually a child in a developing country, dies from rabies. This means more than 60,000 people die every year and over 95% of these cases are caused by the bite of a rabies-infected dog. However, we can prevent these deaths by vaccinating the dog population in countries with rabies. The theme this year is *Rabies: Share the message. Save a life.* which continues to support the global aim to end human deaths from dog-mediated rabies by 2030. Many organisations worldwide, including the OIE and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN, will be celebrating this day. The department will also be recognising the day on its Twitter feed so look out for this! On World Rabies Day I will be visiting the National Institute for Animal Health of Germany to mark the tenth anniversary of Western and Central Europe being recognised as rabies free.

Congratulations

Finally I'd like to congratulate one of our profession's stars, AVA member Gyan Weerasinghe, who has been recognised with the World Small Animal Veterinary Association's 2018 Next Generation Veterinary Award. The award acknowledges the work of a recently graduated veterinarian who has significantly contributed to the betterment of companion animals, the veterinary profession and society at large.

Abandonment of employment: a guide

In the workplace, it's not entirely uncommon for employees to simply stop showing up. This may occur after a period of leave, a performance meeting or a dispute with a colleague or client. If it was to happen, what are the rights of employers and employees?

Is there a definition of 'abandonment of employment'?

While there is no specific definition of 'abandonment of employment' in the Fair Work Act 2009, an employment contract, workplace policy or modern award may contain a provision relating to it. Note, there is no such provision in the Animal Care and Veterinary Services Award 2010. Generally, an employee is deemed to have abandoned their employment when they have ceased appearing for work and ceased to communicate their absence to their employer.

Is there a specific period that must pass before abandonment is confirmed?

While a modern award may contain an indicative period of time – generally 14 days – there is no hard and fast rule here. Similarly, a contract of employment or workplace policy may also have a specific period stipulated. What is crucially important however, is that the employer must take the additional step of ending the employment relationship when an employee abandons their employment i.e. employment doesn't automatically end when an employee stops showing up for work.

Are there any risks?

In some circumstances, further investigation should be conducted before assuming an employee has abandoned their employment. For example, an employee may have been bullied and if this goes unmanaged/uninvestigated, the employer could be exposed to an unfair or unlawful dismissal claim. In any instance where you believe an employee may have abandoned their employment, contact the AVA HR Advisory Service.

Has abandonment occurred? Follow this process:

Step 1: Review leave records to ensure that the employee's absence has not been authorised.

Step 2: As soon as you suspect the employee has no intention of returning to work, attempt to contact them by all reasonable means (phone, email) to discuss the issue and confirm your suspicions. Employers are often reluctant to make direct contact with an employee who is absent without reason, but it is necessary to clarify and confirm what is going on with your employee. You may even consider attempting to contact the employee through other people such as work colleagues, family members or treating practitioners or even to visit the employee's home.

Step 3: If you are unable to contact them by telephone/email or they refuse to speak with you, send a letter by either registered mail or courier to their last known address stating that you believe they have abandoned their employment as they have failed to show up for work at the usual time and consequently their employment may be terminated. Your letter must request the employee to contact you to provide an acceptable reason for their absence or return to normal duty within a seven day time frame.

Failure of the employer to explore all ways to contact the employee may indicate that the employment agreement remains ongoing and entitlements continue to accrue.

Step 4: Ensure that the employee has not contacted someone else in the workplace and provided a reason for their absence. Therefore, you may need to ask other staff if they know the whereabouts of the employee.

Step 5: Consider any underlying issues behind the employee's unexpected absence and investigate where necessary.

Step 6: If no response or other evidence has been received from the employee after seven days then termination is assumed, and a termination letter can be sent to the employee including any outstanding payments.

Step 7: Should the letter/s be returned unclaimed, keep it in the individuals employment file as proof of your attempt to contact them should they attempt reinstatement at some later date.

In summary

A potential abandonment of employment situation is rarely straight forward. It is strongly recommended to contact the AVA HR Advisory before taking any action in these circumstances.



Jack Byrnes
HR Specialist

For more information or assistance, please contact the friendly team at the AVA HR Advisory Service on:

Telephone: 1300 788 977
Fax: (02) 8448 3299
Email: hrhotline@ava.com.au

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Helping animals, helping people

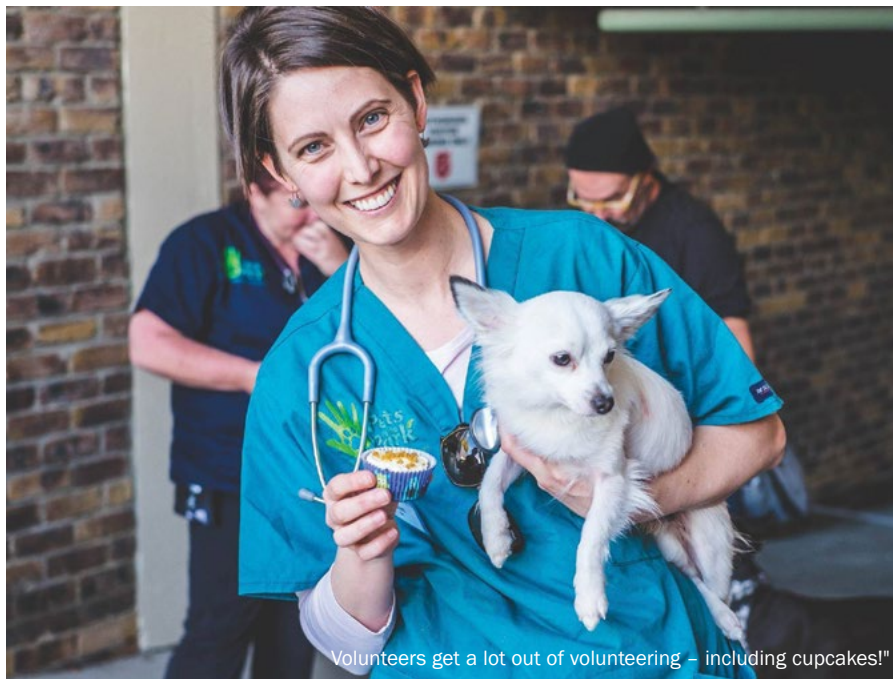
In 2009, veterinarian Dr Mark Westman started visiting a soup kitchen in Parramatta, Sydney with a fold-out table and an esky of vaccines. The soup kitchen had a range of services available to help people experiencing homelessness, but there were no providers who could to look after the health of their animal companions.

More than 100,000 people experience homelessness every night in Australia. These people are exposed to fear, insecurity, and judgement on a daily basis – not to mention the very real threat of physical harm. However, the impact of homelessness isn't limited to humans alone. Pets of the homeless are also placed into a precarious situation, often living in cars or temporary housing with their owners. With no Medicare system for animals, there is no safety net for those owners who cannot afford basic veterinary care.

Dr Westman's aim on that cold night in Parramatta was to provide basic veterinary care to these animals, with the dual purpose of improving animal health and strengthening the human-animal bond. In 2012, Dr Westman teamed up with another veterinarian, Dr Leah Skelsey, and two veterinary nurses, to expand the service into a formal charity, Pets in the Park.

With a grassroots approach to helping the pets of people experiencing homelessness, the need for their services quickly outstripped the capacity of the Parramatta-based clinic. Soon new clinics and branches of the charity were springing up around the country.

There are now seven 'pop-up' clinics held at least monthly around Australia. There are two clinics in Sydney (Darlinghurst and



Volunteers get a lot out of volunteering – including cupcakes!"

Parramatta), two in Melbourne (Central and Frankston) and one clinic each in Queensland (Fortitude Valley), ACT (Canberra) and Tasmania (Hobart). With the official launch of the national charity held in Canberra in 2017, there are two more clinics on the cards. It is anticipated that in the next 12 months the Adelaide and Perth branches of the charity will commence operations.

A national board of veterinarians and veterinary nurses oversees the running of Pets in the Park, and with the exception of a part-time National Executive Officer, the entire organisation is run by volunteers. Each state has a local executive committee who oversee the running of the local clinics. These executive committees also contribute with fundraising activities to help purchase

equipment and consumables. Support from companies, including Virbac Animal Health, Microchips Australia and Applaws Natural Pet Food ensures the clinics are adequately stocked at all times.

One Welfare

Clients of Pets in the Park are encouraged to visit monthly, where pets will receive flea, tick and worm preventatives, a full physical examination and investigation of any issues. Initially all pets get vaccinated and microchipped, with desexing booked within the first six months of receiving assistance. Although many of the pets receiving support from Pets in the Park are dogs, a growing number of cats visit the monthly clinics as well as the occasional budgie, ferret, rabbit and rat.

Access to the services provided by Pets in the Park can only be obtained if the client gets a referral letter from a human services provider, such as the Red Cross or the Salvation Army.

It's about so much more than just treating a patient ... the conversations and bonds we form with the clients who visit us can be pretty life-changing.

This is to ensure there is both a legitimate need for the free veterinary care provided by the charity, but more importantly, to ensure the person seeking assistance for their pet also get help for themselves. In that sense it is very much a 'One Welfare' charity, seeking to improve the lives of both humans and animals.

The aim of the organisation is "to support, build relationships with and improve the wellbeing of homeless people in society living with animal companions". Protecting the unconditional love, comfort, companionship and security provided by pets is acknowledged as an important aspect of the charity. This effort isn't unnoticed by clients of Pets in the Park. John, who used to visit Pets in the Park Canberra with his dog Champers, said at the national launch "the veterinarians [have] been very, very good. They supply medication free and they've had teeth done for the dogs. Wouldn't be without them." Unfortunately, Champers passed away in late 2017 at 18 years of age. Support from Pets in the Park in the final few months of Champers' life meant he was free from painful dental disease. For his owner John, this support meant he no longer had to worry about Champers pain, or the quality of life of his best mate.

The benefit to veterinarians

Veterinarians who are involved in the charity speak highly of the merits of volunteering their time at a clinic. Dr Dilly Abeyawardane from Pets in the Park Canberra says, "As a vet, I have always enjoyed donating my time and skills when possible. I helped start Pets in the Park Canberra so the less fortunate could care for their much-loved pets without worrying about the financial burden".

Dr Jackie Campbell from Pets in the Park Brisbane agrees "Pets in the Park allows us to provide care to some of the most wonderful, yet challenged, people in our communities and I love that we do this through the care of their pets. It's about so much more than just treating a patient. Often the conversations and bonds we form with the clients who visit us can be pretty life-changing."

However, volunteering as a veterinarian at the monthly clinic is not the only way to get involved. Veterinary nurses and administration volunteers are also needed at the clinics, as well as clinics happy to assist with surgeries, and people willing to fundraise. Donations are always appreciated and help to purchase bigger items like otoscopes.

More information, including how to volunteer at a Pets in the Park clinic, can be found by visiting <http://www.petsinthepark.org.au>.

Bronwyn Orr

Executive Committee Member
Pets in the Park Canberra.

Homelessness casts a wide net



Pets in the Park Brisbane volunteers at the end of another successful clinic



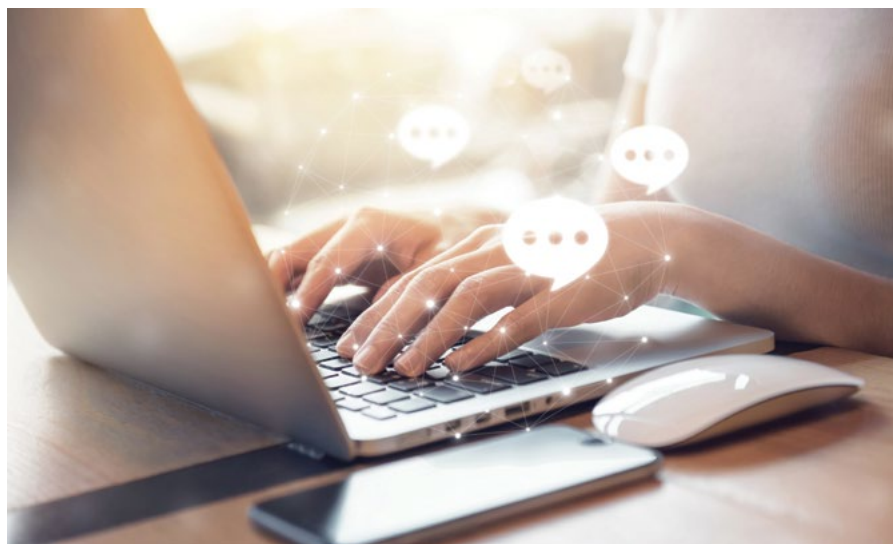
Dealing with the dreaded negative social media review

Over the past decade social media has become increasingly integrated into daily life, and as a result has changed the way we interact with each other and with businesses. Social media has created a whole new avenue for communication that allows rapid and efficient distribution of information between businesses and the public. Gone are the days where the clinic's online presence was restricted to a static, difficult to manage webpage. Now with social media, your clinic can share business updates, information about new products and services, and most importantly all those cute patient photos you take throughout the day, with the click of a button and the ease of an app on your phone.

It's also never been easier for a client to find your business, with a simple Google search providing clients with information for all the clinics in the area. Those clients who give you cards and gifts for Christmas can now share how great your clinic is with the world by leaving heartfelt 5-star reviews on your clinic's page. But like all things, there's also a dark side to social media and this is something many veterinarians may find challenging to deal with.

It doesn't matter if you've recently had 50 amazingly positive and thankful 5-star reviews; it's that single 1-star review that will keep you up at night wondering, "where did I go wrong?" It's these reviews that we wish we could just delete or ignore and pretend they never happened. But as it's 'social media' after all, everyone can see the review and it's often these 1-star reviews that grab people's attention when they're scoping out your business.

Reviews tend to be in the extremes; they'll either be 5-stars or 1-star, very few are ever in the middle. This is often because the people who leave the reviews are passionate about their pets and want to share their opinions and thoughts. This passion can also make them irrational at



times. What you thought was a routine case can be interpreted very differently by a misunderstanding client, and rather than discuss it with you first they decide to leave their permanent mark and share their displeasure for everyone to see. Other times the client was just dissatisfied with your service, but it's not possible to please everyone all the time, no matter how hard you try. The way you respond to the negative review is critical to protect your brand's integrity, demonstrate professionalism and your commitment to customer service and potentially turn a negative into a positive in the process.

Responding to reviews with statements such as "thank you for your feedback" or "we're sorry to hear that you weren't satisfied with your recent experience", shows that you have acknowledged their comments and value their opinions and thoughts. Remaining professional and polite is essential, and it is important to not get personal, no matter how hard that may be, because remember, the world can read your response! Addressing specifics in writing can lead to others becoming involved in the conversation and creates room for confusion and misinterpretation. We don't need a simple review becoming a social media witch-

hunt, that's a whole separate issue in itself! The best option is to direct the dissatisfied client to contact you directly over the phone so that you can discuss it with them personally. This reduces the risk of confusion and seeks to address the concern in the one sitting, rather than a back-and-forth of messages with each party getting more flustered and zealous with every response.

We're all human and sometimes we make mistakes, this includes clients leaving reviews for the wrong clinic. By making the client aware of this, they can easily alter the review and potentially become a new client in the process. But if they're not responsive, and you can prove the person is not a customer, you can lodge a request with Google or Facebook to have the review removed.

Overall, it's important to remember that the reviews we receive are the thoughts and opinions of only a tiny proportion of clients we see each day and when the ratio of positive to negative is as high as it is for the majority of clinics, you're certainly doing something right, whether you realise it or not. Although at times social media can cause needless stress in our lives, if we didn't have it around how else would we be able to watch and share all those cat videos?

Stephen Reinsich

Veterinary science legend remembered at event

In a recent speech at the University of Melbourne, Professor Emeritus Norman Williamson reflected on the lighter side of his distinguished mentor, Professor Douglas Charles Blood. During the lecture, Professor Williamson regaled the audience with anecdotes of Blood's predilection for smelly cheese, old computers and pottering around in a vegetable garden, while also illustrating the profound effect his work had for all of us in veterinary science.

Professor Blood, or "Prof. Blood" as he was affectionately known by many of his students, was the founder of the Melbourne Veterinary Science school in its current form, an author of international renown and one of the foremost thinkers in the field of veterinary teaching.

The talk provided a powerful reminder that the efforts of a single passionate individual can make a huge difference in the world; that creativity, dedication and even a little eccentricity can forge a path that echoes throughout years. Professor Williamson, now considered one of the world leaders in veterinary education, is testament to this – his own career heavily influenced by his time studying under Blood.

Others that Professor Blood taught have gone on to lead their own organisations; schools, veterinary clinics, industry companies and even businesses outside of the vet field. The impact of someone so energised by their calling is significant.

Professor Williamson's memories were strong and evocative, fondly tracing his early days at Melbourne University with his esteemed tutor. An experience probably familiar to many current and former students: new to the vet world, unsure of ourselves and where we are going. Helping all of us along the way are people like Prof. Blood and for that we're extremely grateful.

The great man would have been proud to be in the lecture, hearing how his animated efforts as a teacher would

be talked about half a century later. Apparently he was adept at impersonating animals with specific ailments – a horse with stringhalt for instance – something the students remembered years later with a smile.

Later in the lecture, the topic moved to the future of veterinary education. Always the innovator, Blood was an early proponent of computers in the classroom, beginning with farm plans and moving later to diagnostic tools driven by databases.

Veterinary teaching is ever-evolving as new technologies become available, continuing a trajectory that began many years ago back in Melbourne. Now it's the potential of artificial intelligence and the growing power of social networking where innovation lies. The opportunity is in having students understand and learn with intelligent systems, to provide them with the ability to better understand clients, cases and ecosystems.

Nothing beats a good old-fashioned lecturer though and there's a message in the theatrical larger-than-life nature of Prof. Blood. It's not just something to laugh at – it's powerful stuff, the ability to engage, to be relevant and to get people to laugh. That's how we truly learn.

"How do we get that camaraderie and the contact with fellow students, if we are doing most of this remotely?" asked a member of the audience in a Q&A session afterward. It's a good point and comes to the heart of Blood's greatest accomplishment. He was successful because he was able to inspire and, ultimately, connect with his students. Any new system of learning needs to do the same. I have no doubt that we'll find the way and the tools to do this. If we don't, we risk losing elements of the teaching process that are so important to producing successful veterinarians.

When striking a new path, you try a bunch of things, you suggest a new approach; some of these things may not be immediately practical but they make an impression and those impressions eventually form a path. As Professor Williamson showed us that night, the efforts of Professor Blood have formed a wonderful path.

James Ramsden



Professor Emeritus
Norman Williamson

What every veterinarian needs to know – ASTAG Antimicrobial Importance Ratings

Co-chaired by Australia's Chief Veterinary Officer and Chief Medical Officer, the Australian Strategic and Technical Advisory Group on Antimicrobial Resistance (ASTAG)¹ includes representatives from across the fields of human health, animal health, food, agriculture and the environment. The purpose of ASTAG is to develop and provide expert advice to the Australian Government on AMR-related issues.

One task of ASTAG is to maintain a current list of Importance Ratings and Summary of Antibacterial Uses in Human and Animal Health in Australia, an initiative that commenced in 2002. The Antibacterial Importance Ratings provide information and guidance to inform decision making about the registration and use of antibacterial medicines in Australia and the latest version has just been made available online.²

A summary of the Importance Ratings is set out below, but the entire document is highly relevant to all veterinarians who use antibacterial drugs as the importance rating should be a key consideration in antibacterial drug selection – the higher the rating the higher the possible risk to animal or human health from associated AMR.

It is clear that amongst the 43 classes of antibacterial medicines used in humans or animals in Australia, there are 17 classes only registered for use in humans, 7 classes that only have uses in animals, and 19 classes that are shared between human and animal uses. The least likelihood of harm to human health is associated with the use of veterinary only classes.

When considering the use of antibacterial agents in animals, the importance rating is a guide to the potential for AMR associated harm. Other factors to consider include the degree of exposure, the potential for resistance selection, the frequency of use and a range of other factors that are presented in the risk assessment methodology of APVMA.³

1. The Australian Strategic and Technical Advisory Group on AMR (ASTAG). <https://www.amr.gov.au/australias-response/objective-7-governance/amr-advisory-group>
2. Importance Ratings and Summary of Antibacterial Uses in Human and Animal Health in Australia <https://www.amr.gov.au/resources/importance-ratings-and-summary-antibacterial-uses-human-and-animal-health-australia>
3. APVMA Antibiotic resistance risk assessments <https://apvma.gov.au/node/1018>

Stephen Page

AVA Nomination to ASTAG



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Antibacterial Class	ASTAG Importance*	Use**	Registered Veterinary Example
Antileptotics	High	Human Only	None
Antimycobacterials	High	Human Only	None
Carbapenems	High	Human Only	None
4th Generation Cephalosporins	High	Human Only	None
Anti-MRSA Cephalosporins	High	Human Only	None
Cephamecins	Medium	Human Only	None
Fosfomycins	High	Human Only	None
Fusidanes	High	Human Only	None
Glycopeptides	High	Human Only	None
Glycylcyclines	High	Human Only	None
Lipopeptides	High	Human Only	None
Macrocyclic lactones	High	Human Only	None
Monobactams	High	Human Only	None
Oxazolidinones	High	Human Only	None
Broad-spectrum penicillins	Medium	Human Only	None
Pseudomonic acids	Medium	Human Only	None
Rifamycins	High	Human Only	None
β -lactamase inhibitor combinations	Medium-High	Shared (H, CA, FA)	Amoxicillin-clavulanate
Aminoglycosides / Aminocyclitols	Low-High	Shared (H, CA, FA)	Spectinomycin
Amphenicols	Low	Shared (H, CA, FA)	Florfenicol
1st Generation Cephalosporins	Medium	Shared (H, CA, FA)	Cefalexin
2nd Generation Cephalosporins	Medium	Shared (H, FA)	Cefuroxime
3rd Generation Cephalosporins	High	Shared (H, CA, FA)	Ceftiofur
Lincosamides	Medium	Shared (H, CA, FA)	Lincomycin
Macrolides	Low	Shared (H, CA, FA)	Tylosin
Nitrofurans	High	Shared (H, CA)	Nitrofurazone
Nitroimidazoles	Medium	Shared (H, CA)	Metronidazole
Antistaphylococcal penicillin's	Medium	Shared (H, CA, FA)	Cloxacilin
Moderate-spectrum penicillin's	Low	Shared (H, CA, FA)	Amoxicillin
Narrow-spectrum penicillin's	Low	Shared (H, CA, FA)	Benzyl penicillin
Polymyxins	High	Shared (H, CA, FA)	Polymyxin B (topical)
Polypeptides	Low	Shared (H, CA, FA)	Bacitracin
Quinolones	High	Shared (H, CA)	Enrofloxacin
Sulfonamides and dihydrofolate reductase inhibitors	Low-Medium	Shared (H, CA, FA)	Sulfadiazine-trimethoprim
Streptogramins	High	Shared (H, CA, FA)	Virginiamycin
Tetracyclines	Low	Shared (H, CA, FA)	Oxytetracycline
Arsenicals	Low	Veterinary Only (CA)	Sodium arsanilate
Bambermycins	Low	Veterinary Only (FA)	Flavophospholipol
Coumermycins	Low	Veterinary Only (FA)	Novobiocin
Ionophores	Low	Veterinary Only (FA)	Monensin
Orthosomycins	Low	Veterinary Only (FA)	Avilamycin
Pleuromutilins	Low	Veterinary Only (FA)	Tiamulin
Quinoxalines	Low	Veterinary Only (FA)	Olaquinox

* Low Importance: There are a reasonable number of alternative antibacterials in different classes available to treat or prevent most human infections even if antibacterial resistance develops.

Medium Importance: There are some alternative antibacterials in different classes available to treat or prevent human infections, but less than for those rated as Low Importance.

High Importance: These are essential antibacterials for the treatment or prevention of infections in humans where there are few or no treatment alternatives for infections. These have also been termed "last resort" or "last line" antibacterials.

** H human; FA food animals; CA companion animals

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