

British Veterinary Association Members' Day Speech

Dr. Malcolm Morley, BVA President

28 September 2023

AS DELIVERED

Thank you, David.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to David for your leadership, strategic thinking, and unwavering commitment. As an integral part of the leadership team at BVA, your dedication to supporting our association – without ever losing sight of our core values – is invaluable.

Challenge and uncertainty have characterised the last few years. As David has outlined, the last few weeks have been no exception with the announcements of both the CMA review into veterinary services and the Prime Minister's commitment to ban American XL bullies by the end of the year.

When the veterinary profession faces uncertainties like these, it highlights the ongoing importance that BVA speaks with one strong voice on behalf of the profession. When I see this process in action, as in Council today, I feel immensely proud to be a member, and even more so to be an Officer, representing your voice and championing your views, which is so important during challenging times.

Cost of living and CMA

While BVA represents individual vets rather than veterinary businesses, responding to the CMA's review will be a key piece of work over the coming months. Our incoming President Anna Judson will say more on this later, but we will ensure the review takes into account our profession's systemic challenges and acknowledges that the overwhelming motivation of vets is delivering the best care for animals and their owners.

I don't believe we should shy away from external scrutiny, but it is vital that it is undertaken through a clear and well-informed lens. We have been very aware of how some in the media have pre-judged the outcome, and the impact the

subsequent negative coverage has had on our members. In addition to engaging with the CMA and responding to the review, we've been talking to media across the UK, challenging inaccurate accusations levelled at vet teams; dispelling myths around how vets work in practice; raising awareness of the value of veterinary care; as well as talking about the changes shaping the profession.

It's critical that we help owners understand why veterinary care costs what it does - from the cost of running a practice, with all the consumables and supplies needed, through to the ensuring our highly skilled workforce is properly paid.

The boom of pandemic pets has been closely followed by the biggest squeeze on UK cost-of-living since the 70's. Some animal owners are finding themselves in really desperate times, often struggling to afford very basic care. The situation has certainly taken its toll on vet teams, who are finding themselves at the sharp end of really difficult conversations with clients, and in some cases, colleagues are experiencing unacceptable abuse, particularly linked to the cost of vet care.

BVA has produced a useful resource to support vet teams with conversations about costs and the value of vet care, so please download it, and encourage your teams to make use of it.

Investing in people

We're all aware that workforce shortages remain an issue and with that firmly in mind, my presidential theme 'Investing in People' has been anchored in BVA's Good Veterinary Workplaces initiative. I'm extremely proud of the support we've delivered, which, like the Value of Vet Care guide, focuses on providing practical resources to help both employers and employees build positive, inclusive workplaces. That culture is essential for supporting thriving veterinary teams that can recruit and retain staff as well as delivering high-quality care for patients.

As part of that supportive culture, our new 'Talking about pay' guide helps all members of Team Vet have constructive conversations on this potentially challenging topic, whether they are employees, managers or employers. And earlier this summer we launched our new Menopause Hub, designed to support everyone affected by this life stage.

It really is an important issue, particularly given the demographic of our profession, and one that I would urge all members to engage with. [Evidence given to the Women and Equalities parliamentary committee by BUPA](#) last year suggested that 900,000 women may have left the UK workforce in recent years as a result of menopausal symptoms.

BVA's own Voice research showed that much more support is needed in the profession on this issue. Only 14% of vets are aware of a menopause policy at their workplace, while 46% say there is no policy and 39% are unsure. The survey also revealed that only 59% of vets would feel confident supporting a colleague experiencing menopause. Again, given that the veterinary profession is increasingly female in composition, we need to be taking these statistics very seriously.

The Menopause Hub, alongside other BVA member resources such as our 'Guide to Flexible Working' will help provide the right support to enable more women to stay in the profession. As well as this being the actions of supportive and equitable employers, providing support and making any reasonable adjustments may well mean that we will retain their vital skills and experience in the workforce. If you're yet to take a look at the Hub, please do. It also includes some excellent member only benefits, like personalised medical support via 'Stella', a specialist menopause support app.

For those of us who are not directly affected by menopause, I think it is equally important to reflect on the impact it can have on some of our valued team members... and therefore on all of us. I urge you to open your minds to the hidden impact it can have on retention and consider whether you and your workplace could do more to acknowledge the challenges and consider whether ways of working are inclusive of the whole team.

The wider wellbeing of the vet team has also been a focus this year. Our 'Taking Action' webinar series, in partnership with VDS, has shone a light on individuals and workplaces who prioritise the wellbeing of teams in veterinary workplaces and wider.

We also recently launched our BVA Wellbeing Awards which will recognise those in our profession who exemplify that theme. Anna will be announcing the winners

alongside the Young Vet of the Year 2023 at this year's BVA Gala Dinner during the London Vet Show – and I hope you'll be joining me there!

Although we still have progress to make in addressing challenges like recruitment and retention, I know that the work BVA is doing is bolstering and empowering our people, and helping to create better, more supporting workplaces, will allow them to thrive. Worldwide, many veterinary associations are recognising BVA's Good Workplaces as a model for the future and BVA will continue this important work as our new President, Anna Judson, picks up the baton.

Engaging the veterinary community - BVA Live

One of the (many!) highlights of my presidential year was BVA Live in May – it was just so fantastic to see so many colleagues engaging with the excellent CPD on offer and delving into thought-provoking discussions.

As with many delegates I spoke to, I found the interactive debate sessions particularly engaging. The unique format really allowed us to delve into challenging subjects, contributing our thoughts, but also challenging our own viewpoints by listening and learning from others.

BVA Live will return in June 2024, and along with our events partner Closer Still Media, we will be opening the doors to even more veterinary professionals than ever before with a new Educational Bursaries Scheme.

This exciting scheme will offer 2,000 veterinary professionals, including BVA members, fully funded entry to the conference. In addition, in response to feedback from our member survey, we're working with specialist divisions to develop a dedicated large animal stream to more fully reflect the composition of BVA membership. These developments will ensure that more vets across the profession have access to more diverse and high-quality clinical CPD. As before, we will also provide opportunities to engage with a wide range of non-clinical CPD topics encompassing career development, business, leadership and creating Good Veterinary Workplaces.

Legislative reform

However, initiatives to support the profession can only go so far. We simply can't build the veterinary teams of the future on the shaky foundations of outdated legislation. The Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 is no longer fit for purpose and this year BVA has been supporting the RCVS in pushing for much needed reform, including in relation to the regulation of veterinary business.

There is also the issue of recognition of the wider veterinary team. I think everyone here would agree that vets don't work in isolation. We are closely supported by highly skilled individuals, such as vet techs, musculoskeletal professionals and equine dental technicians, but the current Act doesn't recognise these important roles or enable us to embrace the full potential of our colleagues.

We need modern legislation and regulation to support the future development of the veterinary professions. An important part of any new legislation should also include legal protection for the title of Registered Veterinary Nurse. Any of you, even my Dad, can call themselves a vet nurse, which is quite extraordinary given the expertise of these colleagues, and this must be rectified, so please do join us and support BVNA's campaign to Protect the Title.

Under care

I know many of you share our concerns about the implications of Under Care guidance, which have caused confusion and frustration. Changes to RCVS's Guidance came into force earlier this month. While we welcome the clarification on the Guidance and the requested extension to the compliance deadline for the prescription of POM-Vs, our position remains that the Guidance as it stands represents a missed opportunity to put the vet-client-patient relationship at the heart of defining when an animal is 'under care'. However, we will continue to support our members by engaging with the College to seek clarification where issues cause further concern, by developing supporting resources, and by continuing to urge the College to carry out an effective and timely post-implementation review of the changes to identify any unforeseen impacts on animal welfare and access to veterinary services, and to act on its recommendations.

Animal Welfare

As vets, animal welfare remains core to the work we do as and this year BVA has been working tirelessly to advocate for crucial legislation to help more animals live good lives.

We've had some important success over the past 12 months — securing three years of veterinary medicine supplies for Northern Ireland to allow time to find a more permanent post-Brexit solution. That was crucial, and has been a strong team effort working with our Northern Irish branch.

New laws came into effect in England in November banning the use of inhumane rodent glue traps, and the Welsh Government introduced the first Welsh Agriculture Bill, also banning rodent glue traps and the use of snares.

However, it was extremely disappointing to receive news that the Kept Animals Bill would not be progressing through Parliament. After years of hard work getting this vital legislation to the final hurdle, this felt like a huge wasted opportunity for the Government. However, we've secured assurances that the Government will take forward crucial elements of the Bill through secondary legislation. With the consultation on proposals to ban the keeping of primates as pets now live, we're also seeing positive progress, so will continue to lobby on our key asks, such as banning imported dogs with cropped ears, pregnant dogs, or those aged under 6 months.

We've lobbied for draft legislation, which is currently passing through Parliament, that would ban the use of electric shock collars on cats and dogs in England.

However, whilst the legislation has passed its House of Lords stage, there is still no allocated time for its reading in the House of Commons. This is important as we're aware of an aggressive professional pro-electric shock collar campaign trying to stop this legislation going through by attempting to discredit BVA's evidence-based policy position and by smearing other reputable animal welfare and veterinary organisations who also support the Bill.

Please do help us get this important legislation over the line. This is a job for #TeamVet and we're asking everyone, all of you in this room, to contact their MP and urge the government to set a date for the House of Commons reading - you can download an email template from our website.

Environmental sustainability and BVA

As David said, environmental sustainability will remain a priority for BVA in the coming association year, and I want to thank Justine for all her work championing this important issue during her time as a BVA Officer.

It is important to also acknowledge the determination of our members to champion sustainability, both within veterinary workplaces and across the wider sectors in which we work. A key role for BVA is supporting our members to bring about change. This year, we've worked with Vet Sustain and others to help #TeamVet consider our profession's environmental impact and to track carbon emissions particularly in practice, through the launch of the first ever Veterinary Carbon Calculator.

It was also fantastic to hear David just mention our iiE green accreditation and Sustainability Influencer of the Year Award too – congratulations to the whole team for that brilliant achievement which has also taken a lot of commitment and work, often behind the scenes.

Thank you

I also want to take a final few moments to thank BVA Members. Quite simply, we can't do all this great work without you. I'm incredibly proud of the BVA community and a huge thank you must be extended to all our volunteer Council and committee members, and our divisions too. You lend us your skills, your expertise — and most importantly your scrutiny — and by working together we are a far richer profession for it.

Thanks also go to our dedicated Branches in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. As you've heard from Gareth, they continue to ensure that BVA's impact reaches all parts of the UK on the issues that matter both nationally and locally.

A thank you to my fellow officers. Anna and Justine.

In handing over to Anna Judson and welcoming Liz Mullineaux I know that BVA is in good hands. Having worked with Anna for the last year I know that she has an excellent understanding of the profession, an incredible personal drive and will give the job her all.

From a personal perspective, thank you to my family and especially my wife Poppy for being such a supporter. She can't be here today because of work commitments but has been incredibly tolerant of my enthusiasm to devote so much time to BVA. Also, huge thanks to my colleagues at Stable Close Equine Practice — without their hard work caring for horses I could not be here.

Finally, I want to thank to BVA's staff. There is nothing I could say which would do justice to the passion, determination and hard work that they put into supporting our profession. Thank you.

So, what a year! The good news, or maybe the bad news, is that you're not getting rid of me just yet and I am very much looking forward to a year combining Senior Vice President, clinical director and frontline, first-opinion vet.

Thank you.

ENDS