

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 12.30PM ON SUNDAY 26 SEPTEMBER 2010**

## **NEW BVA PRESIDENT HARVEY LOCKE'S INAUGURAL SPEECH**

Members of the Association, Ladies and Gentlemen, I consider myself a very lucky person having spent the last 41 years in a job that has given me great personal and professional satisfaction. I feel that the very least I can do now is to try and give something back.

I have been part of a family heritage that has seen five consecutive generations serve the veterinary profession. There seems to be an inherited trait (some may say a genetic defect) that has steered some of us to become involved in veterinary politics. Both my grandfather and great grandfather held high office in the RCVS, the latter exactly 100 years ago.

Whilst having the utmost respect for those who work in the College, having spent my whole career in general practice I know that my role is in contributing to the work of the BVA in representing its members by promoting and protecting our profession.

It seems like only yesterday that I became BVA president-elect. But much has happened over the last 12 months. The Association has enjoyed a successful year. However, I am under no illusions about the task in hand over the next year. I promise you that I will give an unwavering commitment to the job that I have been given.

I would like to start by thanking all those involved in this excellent Congress. Bill's theme of 'Vets and the Public Good' has shone through the presentations and debates and I believe it has truly captured the essence of the veterinary profession over the last twelve months.

We live in rapidly changing times and as a traditional profession we must strive to keep up. As the national professional body I believe the BVA should always be one step ahead and that is why I have chosen 'Vets in a Changing World' as the theme for my presidential year.

From the internal changes to BVA Council to the new Coalition Government; from the prospect of a new Veterinary Surgeons Act to the impact of global climate change and the increasingly free movement of people and animals; we sit in the midst of enormous fluctuation. Each element brings its own challenges and opportunities and I'd like to outline a few of those today.

Earlier on we voted to make significant changes to the way the BVA is structured. It's been a rocky road to get to where we are, but I don't think I am exaggerating when I say that I believe we have just voted to secure the future of our Association.

It is often stated that the strength of the BVA lies in its membership. When the President speaks, it is with the voices of more than 12,000 members. But that only works if we have truly succeeded in engaging our members.

Of course I accept that the average BVA member is far too busy to plough through a 50-page Defra consultation or debate the finer points of the Veterinary Medicines Regulations. That is why we have a representative structure.

The system works well, but I believe it can, and will, be even better. By moving towards the new regional representative model we will enhance every member's ability to contribute as little or as much as he or she wishes.

Over the coming months we will be putting in place a communications structure to make it as easy as possible for individual members' views to be fed directly into Council.

While our committees will continue to look at issues in detail, alongside our specialist and territorial divisions, I hope that BVA Council will begin to generate ideas and issues that will drive the BVA's programme for policy and services.

In a few weeks time we will be asking members to put themselves forward as regional representatives. We need great communicators and members who have the passion and drive to make the new-look BVA Council work to its optimum.

Of course a significant element in the success of BVA Council and of our day-to-day work is our divisions – both specialist and territorial. Although we will lose the direct representation of territorial divisions on BVA Council I am keen that we continue to work very closely with them on specific issues and on the increasingly successful recent graduate support scheme.

The input of our territorial divisions was crucial when we held an emergency meeting to discuss Animal Health's decision to put OV services out to tender (of which more later) and as new issues come to light we will undoubtedly benefit from their experiences and contacts with vets on the ground.

It would be fair to say that the BVA's relationship with its specialist divisions has fluctuated over the years, but I've been incredibly impressed by the level of engagement between the BVA and divisions during my year as president-elect.

Our symbiotic relationship is at its best when the scientific expertise of our divisions works alongside the BVA's policy and PR expertise. It is often said that the veterinary profession speaks best when it speaks with one voice and I believe it is a mantra worth repeating.

This mutually beneficial relationship is perhaps best illustrated by the recent joint BVA/BSAVA consultation response on the issue of dangerous dogs, a truly impressive document with sound scientific input from BSAVA; or by the joint lobbying work by BVA and BCVA on the issue of OV fees; or the joint work with BEVA that secured a ban on hot branding in Scotland; or the handling of the Panorama programme with SPVS and BSAVA.

The list goes on. It illustrates how important our specialist divisions are in the shaping and delivery of our policies.

This year I am keen to build on the excellent relationships that we have developed and cement them for the future. Relationships between the divisions and BVA should never have to rely on the personalities of the day.

The better we can represent the whole profession, the more we can increase our membership. As the economic downturn continues to bite the BVA continues to support the needs of both individuals and the profession at large.

Our Members' Services Group is the busiest it has ever been, churning out invaluable resources and developing new services for our growing membership. The focus on employment resources and support for younger members of the profession has helped the BVA come through the calls for a veterinary union stronger than ever.

The mediation and representation services that were launched in March are already having a positive impact on individual members. I believe these initiatives are something we should all be proud of. We cannot solve the problem of the worryingly high incidence of mental health problems in our profession overnight, but working alongside other initiatives the practical measures that BVA services can provide goes a long way to providing that support.

The highly successful Young Vet Network, aimed at helping students in the transition from study to worklife and young vets in the first few years in practice, continues to go from strength to strength and will no doubt benefit from the improved communication channels that will form part of the new Council structure.

At the other end of the scale we hope to harness the positive elements of the Young Vet Network to begin work on a Senior Vet Network. This initiative is borne out of the BVA's recognition of those who have given a lifetime of service to the profession. We must continue to engage with members who have a wealth of knowledge and experience to share and to ensure BVA membership remains a valuable element in their lives.

Recently we reached out to members to ask for help in lobbying politicians on the issue of OV services. This issue has been at the fore for much of the last year and I have no doubt it will remain one of the BVA's priorities for some time.

Not only is the profession's relationship with government at stake, the future security of public and animal health and the financial viability of many veterinary practices are uncertain.

I am proud of the way the BVA has handled the OV discussions to date and hope to continue in the same vein.

However, we must also look at the bigger picture. It is vital that we maintain a good working relationship with Defra and Animal Health. On some issues we enjoy an excellent relationship – pet travel for example – and we maintain close links with the Chief Veterinary Officer (as well as those in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland).

But we must never take our relationship with government for granted. We must continue to work hard at it and earn the respect of politicians and civil servants alike.

We are only just starting to get a picture of the new Government. The commitment to tackling TB will be an early win for Caroline Spelman and her team amongst much of the veterinary community, but concerns remain over a number of important issues.

With budget cuts being made left, right and centre initiatives to promote animal welfare may be scarce and funding for research and development could suffer. We will resist any cuts that could jeopardise public health, disease prevention or animal health and welfare, but it will be difficult.

The current economic climate is also fostering a culture of navel gazing across all walks of life. In the veterinary profession we are a little ahead of the game with Professor Lowe's report on Vets and Veterinary Services, published last year.

Lowe made a number of observations about large animal practice, particularly in rural communities, and expanded his views to comment on regulation of the profession, and the future of para-professionals in the veterinary world.

In the small animal world we have embraced the 'para-profession' of veterinary nursing. I know for one that my own practice just could not survive without the nursing members of the team. In some large and mixed practices veterinary technicians are rapidly becoming an integral part of the veterinary team, but not in all.

I agree with Professor Lowe that as the needs of farming clients change, so must the veterinary profession.

One of the final recommendations of Lowe's report is that a Veterinary Development Council should be set up to investigate practical ways to address the issues around the delivery of veterinary services. At the start of this week Bill announced the appointment Professor Richard Bennett as the chairman of the Veterinary Development Council and the first meeting will take place in January.

This is an exciting development and it firmly places the BVA one step ahead; exactly where I want us to be.

My goals for the coming year are clear and I very much hope that all BVA members will support me in achieving them. Ours is a small profession but our reach and variety of interest is extensive; certainly too much for one person.

I know I shall be relying on the support of our divisions, committees and excellent staff we have in Mansfield Street. But perhaps most importantly I shall be relying on the support of my fellow officers.

The BVA Officer Team changes every year but always manages to maintain a perfect balance of skills, personalities and knowledge.

I cannot overstate how much I have valued Nicky's breadth of experience and wisdom over the last year. I have learned a huge amount from her and I shall miss her input. BVA's loss will be Cornwall's gain but somehow I have a hunch that we have not heard the last from this very talented lady!

Although I do understand her dogs, tortoises, sheep, colleagues and husband are all quite keen to have her back.

As a small animal vet my introduction to TB, OV's and all manner of other large animal issues has been a steep learning curve, but one that has been made far smoother with help from both Nicky and Bill.

So as we enter a time of intense focus on TB with the launch of the Defra consultation, I am absolutely delighted that Padge will be joining us.

But it's not just his encyclopaedic knowledge of *Mycobacterium bovis* I'm interested in. Padge brings a wealth of experience from our divisions, from his sterling work with the

New BVA President Harvey Locke's inaugural speech  
BVA Congress, 26 September 2010

BVA Animal Welfare Foundation, his involvement with students at Lancaster, and much more. Not to mention the fact that he's a fellow Lancastrian!

Finally, I must say a few words about Bill.

I couldn't have hoped for a better president to work with over the past year. His extraordinary ability to weigh up all the arguments and come up with an eminently sensible outcome is astounding. So much so that you might think him better suited to the legal profession, but considering his wonderful sense of humour and how much I enjoy working with him... perhaps not!

Not only is Bill a BVA man through and through, he continues to be a true advocate for our profession and I believe he has moved us forward immeasurably in the last twelve months by espousing the public good of veterinary surgeons and pushing our commitment to animal welfare.

Bill, I am delighted to present you with the BVA past-president's medal and very much look forward to another year with you on the officer team.

Please join me in congratulating Bill on an outstanding presidential year.