

Regulatory reform – embracing the vet-led team meeting

Friday 11 December 2020, 1pm

Zoom meeting

Attendees

Fieke Molenaar – Chair
Richard Casey – Veterinary Management Group
Jane Clark – Policy Committee and Association of Government Vets
Charlotte Commins – British Veterinary Poultry Association
Daniella Dos Santos – BVA Senior Vice President
Amelia Findon – BVA Head of Policy & Governance
David Green – Veterinary Defence Society
Robin Hargreaves – chair of BVA working group on the vet-led team
Andrew Harrison (part) – British Equine Veterinary Association
Lisa Jarvis – Ethics and Welfare Advisory Panel
Sara Pedersen – British Cattle Veterinary Association
Gudrun Ravetz - BVA representative on RCVS Legislation Working Party
Kathleen Robertson – Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons
Alexandra Taylor - British Veterinary Nursing Association

Minutes of the last meeting

1. The minutes of the meeting held 13 November were accepted as an accurate record. It was agreed that the sentence “However, with multiple bodies, conflicting approaches, and no statutory footing the messaging was problematic” should be removed.

Matters arising

2. BVA Council had received an update on the activity of all five working groups at their meeting on 9 December. No substantive issues had been raised by Council members for further discussion by the group.

Regulation of allied professions

3. At the last meeting it had been agreed that both the associate and accreditation models appeared to be appropriate, depending on the group. Since then, confirmation had been received from the College that both models were still on the table. Any group which required legal underpinning via changes to Schedule 3 (or new legislation) would not be eligible for the accreditation route. Groups which did not require legal underpinning could go by either the associate or accreditation route. The College intended to set up working parties to develop the models further.
4. It was noted that the Association of Meat Inspectors (AMI) had been in discussion with the College for a number of years regarding professional recognition and options for regulation. The preferred model was the accreditation model. AMI anticipated that benefits could be gained for the competent authority with a formal professional recognition for MHIs, particularly post Brexit. Accreditation would not prevent Official Auxiliaries who were not members of AMI from carrying out OA work as the role was already statutory, but professional recognition could help give extra confidence in the system.
5. It was noted that the Animal Behaviour and Training Council (ABTC) had also been in discussion with the College for some time regarding accreditation. Timescales were currently unclear.

Separating employment and delegation

6. Schedule 3 of the VSA required VNs to work under the direction and employment of a veterinary surgeon. LWP was recommending that this restriction should be removed. This would allow for a 'district veterinary nurse' model, working 'with but not for' a veterinary practice. LWP had taken the view that decoupling direction from employment would help avoid a potential double-standard relative to other allied professions and help to better use VNs to their full potential in the interests of animal health and welfare.
7. In discussion working group members made the following points:
 - The recent guidance issued by the College relating to musculoskeletal practitioners was clear that they could work on healthy animals without referral. This had the potential to create grey areas as diagnosing health or diagnosing the absence of disease, was an act of veterinary surgery.
 - Scrupulous allied professionals would work as part of the vet-led team and insist on referral from a vet, although it was challenging to enforce, especially as this brought an extra cost to the animals' owner.
 - Farmers were expected to 'diagnose' health before sending an animal for slaughter, but ante-mortem inspection at the abattoir was an act of veterinary surgery. In companion animal owners would continually assess the health status of their animal, presenting the animal to the vet when there was a deviation from 'healthy'
 - If employment and delegation were separated, then there was a risk delegation would become purely notional. Therefore, the delegation should be in writing, like a prescription.
 - If the scope of RVN responsibilities increased at the same time as separation of employment and delegation there was a risk that veterinary oversight could be lost. The scope of the RVN role would need to be very clearly defined.
 - VNs were regulated professionals in their own right and it was no longer appropriate for their activity to be controlled by employment status.
 - BVNA supported the LWP proposal. The safeguard was delegation.
 - The working group looking at 'Enhancing the VN role' had met earlier in the day and had supported the proposal, agreeing that the BVA response to the College should be clear on the importance of all VNs continuing to work under the direction of a vet as part of the vet-led team. The group had agreed that nursing in the community was not advanced nursing or amplifying the role of nurses as the work already took place in the form of nurse home visits from a large number of practices. The only difference would be that the VN was not directly employed by the practice.
 - Once the component parts of a task were broken up across separate businesses then it became necessary to issue formal written instruction such that the 'direction' became clearly defined and specific. In the event of deviation being required then the task would need to return to the directing vet for next steps.
 - It was unclear whether community nursing would work as a business model, but it was agreed that the financial viability of the approach was not the remit of BVA. The flexibility of the model could appeal to some VNs.
 - It was important to remember that delegation and direction was only legally required for Schedule 3 tasks. However, the delegation of an appropriate treatment plan was important from the point of view of continuity of care, regardless of whether it included Schedule 3 tasks.
 - The hub and spoken model from the BVA vet-led team position was still relevant and appropriate.
 - Feedback from the allied professional to the veterinarian, including exchange of clinical notes, was essential to making this model work.
 - There were concerns that VNs would be approached directly by owners, as was already the case in other allied professions. This could be addressed by the VN requiring the owner to obtain referral from the vet, which was a requirement for all Schedule 3

- procedures, before acting in line with a delegated treatment plan.
 - The risk was VNs not referring back to the vet and working outside the vet-led team model. However, it was also recognised that VNs were professionally responsible and vast majority would not willfully ignore a treatment plan.
 - Clear lines of accountability for allied professions, regardless of employment status, was key.
 - Self-employed VNs would need to make their own arrangements for safe working, indemnity insurance and compliance with medicines regulations. Guidance on this should be available through course work.
8. It was agreed that the LWP recommendation on separating delegation from employment should be supported as it would bring parity with other allied professions. The BVA response should highlight potential pitfalls but it was not the role of the group to find all the solutions.

RCVS Vet Tech role

9. RCVS had recently announced the formation of the Veterinary Technicians' Working Party, which would report to the RCVS Registration Committee. The Working Party included representatives from BCVA, as well as members of RCVS and VN Councils, and would be considering a number of issues related to veterinary technicians, including: agreeing a definition of the role and its scope; agreeing day one skills and competences; creating a system for assessing current vet tech courses and qualifications and coming up with a set of educational standards; agreeing a Code of Professional Conduct and a concerns investigation and disciplinary system.
10. In discussion working group members made the following points:
- The move should be supported as there were already individuals working under the veterinary technician banner, although the role was currently ill defined. Granting professional recognition to technicians carrying out tasks on farm was a positive step.
 - There was a risk of confusion with the existing VTS role from the US which provided a post-registration pathway for UK-based VNs.
 - The working group considering LWP recommendations on 'Enhancing the VN role' had raised concerns that the role had the potential to create a two-tier system based on species, which was not appropriate. The group had agreed that there needed to be equivalence at an educational level (ie minimum diploma level 3) on anatomy, physiology, welfare etc rather than creating a task-based role. The group was also concerned that the creation of the role would disincentivise creating farm animal pathways for VNs.
 - The creation of a farm animal pathway for VNs had been under discussion for many years but there had never been sufficient call for it for the proposal to be progressed.
 - 'Technicians' was a term already commonly used in laboratory and research work. There were also poultry technicians, whose work was different to that of farm technicians. Definition would be key.
 - The role would need to be extremely well defined in order to avoid creep into acts of veterinary surgery, and it would be difficult to do this when the potential tasks under the vet tech banner were so wide-ranging. Some vet techs were involved in artificial insemination and disbudding. Where Schedule 3 procedures were concerned regulation as an associate of the College would be required.
 - The vet tech role was already well established in New Zealand. It could be useful to consider their model.
 - The vet tech role was different to veterinary nursing in that it was largely related to healthy animals and preventive care. Vet techs would be carrying out tasks that farmers were often legally permitted to carry out themselves on their own animals, but it was often not practical or desirable to do so.

- The level of responsibility for animal welfare should be the same in farm animal as in companion animal. The creation of a two-tier system was not appropriate.
- A significant portion of the vet tech role would not include acts of veterinary surgery and would not require veterinary delegation or direction. However, it was also recognised that continuity of care and veterinary oversight for animal health and welfare was also a consideration.
- The role needed to work within the context of the vet-led team and the hub and spoke model.

11. It was agreed that BVA should take the matter up with the College.

Action: BVA to liaise with the College on composition of the working group.

Protection of titles

- 12.** At the last meeting it had been agreed that statutory protection of titles should underpin the regulation of Associate groups. The current lack of protection for the title of veterinary nurse was agreed to be an issue.
- 13.** At the recent Joint Officers meeting between BVA and BVNA it had been agreed that the campaign to protect the title of veterinary nurse should be revisited. It was likely this would be taken forward as a priority for 2021-22, with BVA and BVNA working jointly on ensuring appropriate foundations for a successful campaign.
- 14.** In discussion working group members made the following points:
- Recognisable titles should be created and protected. This would provide clarity to vets and animal owners.
 - Delegation frameworks would only work if allied professions were appropriately regulated and titles protected.

Further LWP recommendations

- 15.** In addition to the key recommendations under the 'Embracing the vet-led team' heading in the LWP report, there was an additional, related, recommendation – 8.1: RCVS should be empowered to more easily amend EOs to allow for flexibility and future-proofing.
- 16.** In discussion working group members made the following points:
- The proposal seemed pragmatic given technological advancements and rate of change in the sector.
 - The system should be flexible, but supported by appropriate checks and balances, including consultation with the profession on proposed changes to EOs.
 - EOs should remain narrow, specific, and clearly defined.
 - Amendments through primary legislation were cumbersome and limited by parliamentary time. It was appropriate to future proof legislation so that the system could be more agile in future and adapt to change.
- 17.** It was agreed the proposal should be supported, subject to assurances that future changes to EOs would be in consultation with the profession.

Next steps

- 18.** The BVA secretariat would:
- Circulate the minutes of the meeting
 - Circulate an emerging themes document summarising the advice to date from the working group, including any areas of difficulty for further consideration
 - Share the advice to date with Policy Committee and Ethics and Welfare Advisory Panel for input

19. Working group members were thanked for their participation and considered input. There were currently no plans to hold a further meeting unless Policy Committee or EWAP identified any significant issues with the advice to date.

Action: Secretariat to share minutes from VN working group for completeness.