British Veterinary Association Members' Day Speech

Dr. Anna Judson, BVA President

28 September 2023

AS DELIVERED

Good afternoon.

Thank you, Ryan for those kind words – I didn't know I had that impact, particularly on young vets in Shropshire, so thank you.

I want to start by thanking Malcolm for his outstanding service as BVA President.

With his infectious enthusiasm, unwavering dedication and clear vision, Malcolm has delivered inspirational leadership during a challenging year, and he has been at the forefront of many of BVA's achievements over the last 12 months. But his work championing the future of the veterinary profession through his theme of 'investing in people' is what stands out for me, and which he exemplifies with the time and interest he puts in with every person he meets, and which has been so valuable to me in my JVP year. Thank you so much, Malcolm.

Thank you also to Justine who has helped me so much, she is my media role model, especially with interviews.

As we enter the new association year, BVA will continue to be your collective voice, standing-up for the profession and championing vets, not least when decisions by governments and other external influences impact the capacity of our teams, in some places already stretched to breaking point.

We will also continue to challenge the profession to have open and honest conversations about some of the root causes within our control that could be contributing to workforce issues – and to take action on these.

Being a vet is incredibly rewarding, and I want more people to experience what is a true vocation. We need to build a thriving profession, we need one that attracts and holds onto our people, one that provides the right care at the right time to our patients, and one that contributes positively, rather than impacting on, the planet we share with other animals. We must ask ourselves difficult questions about what we could be doing differently to bring about positive change.

How can we attract more young people from a range of cultures and backgrounds, to choose a career in veterinary medicine, and stop talented people leaving mid-career?

Are we showing our teams how much they are valued through equitable pay, training opportunities and career progression?

Are we doing enough to create welcoming, inclusive workplaces where talented people with differing physical, neurological, and situational needs can thrive?

My presidential theme is ‘a profession for everyone’ – and I really want us to explore these issues and use this time to implement initiatives that drive this positive change.

BVA’s Good Veterinary Workplace initiative is already helping practices to build a more flexible, inclusive and sustainable profession of which we can all be proud. My theme will accelerate that progress, with BVA taking practical steps to support vet teams to build workplaces where everyone can thrive. Creating good veterinary workplaces is vital to the future of the profession, which in turn is good for animal welfare and sustainability.

As has been mentioned, a significant priority for us is ensuring our members' voices are heard as part of the CMA review. It's important for us all to recognise that the outcome may have far reaching consequences, not just for companion animal vet teams but across the profession more broadly. Although undoubtably challenging, we see the review as an opportunity to shine a light on the highly skilled and compassionate work that vets and vet teams deliver day in, day out for animals and their clients across the UK. It's a chance to demonstrate our value, and reset the damaging narrative in the media around costs of veterinary care, something that BVA has been tirelessly challenging over the last twelve months since the cost-of-living crisis took hold.

Working with our divisions, we will be collating our submission to the Review. I urge you and your colleagues to share your voice both directly with the CMA and with us at BVA, so that we can feed in your experiences and insight directly.

Staying with the subject of Government, a general election is just around the corner and we are not only working to capitalise on the opportunities this presents, but also to mitigate any potential impacts.

One of the first casualties was the long-awaited Kept Animals Bill which was dropped over the summer. Whilst it won't go ahead in its original format, we will continue to put pressure on the Government to deliver those elements it has committed to, such as banning the import of dogs with cropped ears or puppies aged under 6 months, and the keeping of primates as pets about which we are already seeing some movement.

Another Government decision, in the wake of tragic events and under intense public and media pressure, was the announcement by Rishi Sunak of his intention to ban American XL Bullies. This was a reactive

response to incidents which have understandably shocked us all. But it's the dogs with a particular appearance who will bear the consequences, rather than the people who are breeding, training, harming and selling dogs with specific looks and behaviours, sometimes for intimidation purposes.

As part of the Dog Control Coalition, alongside Dogs Trust, RSPCA, the Kennel Club and others, we will provide evidence as requested to the emergency Efra inquiry next month. This will ensure the veterinary profession is heard as efforts to define this 'breed' and to shape a workable 'ban' progress. We'll also press Government to fully consider the unintended consequences of a ban, and to address the real root cause of this issue through decisive support of intelligence-led enforcement action to tackle those really responsible and to prevent further harm.

With the rise in dog bite incidents and this proposed ban, we will be reviewing our current position, ensuring it is rooted in the latest evidence. The topic of 'dangerous dogs' will also be a hot topic discussion at BVA Congress at London Vet Show in November, which I hope many of you will attend to share your views. And I look forward to seeing as many of you there as possible.

As I start my tenure as BVA President, I'm excited for the road ahead. There are some difficult challenges for the profession to navigate, but we are a family of dedicated, passionate, and resourceful people. I am confident that together we can continue to build a modern, accessible profession for everyone. One that cares about and advocates for good animal welfare, that provides a rewarding career for all those who seek to be part of it, and one that takes action to protect the planet and its incredible ecosystem that makes this all possible.

My final words are, welcome Liz. Whilst I am sorry to see Justine go and lose all her wisdom, you are welcome.

Thank you.

ENDS