



Vet Futures Summit Report

(Friday 4 July 2016, Royal Veterinary College)



Welcome and opening

The event began with a welcome from Professor Stuart Reid, Principal of the Royal Veterinary College (RVC), who told the 120 assembled delegates how honoured he was that the RVC was hosting this very important event.

Bradley Viner, President of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), thanked people for attending and set out the main purpose of the day – to launch the Vet Futures Action Plan and talk to delegates about how the RCVS and British Veterinary Association (BVA) are planning to turn the recommendations of the Vet Futures Report into action. Bradley encouraged delegates to participate in the proceedings by asking questions, voting for the seven priorities they thought were the most important, to make pledges via the Vet Futures and VN Futures boards outlining how they would be personally supporting the future of their professions, and to take to social media to spread the word.

Sean Wensley, President of the BVA, told delegates that the VN Futures project would also be reporting today and welcomed Liz Cox, Chair of RCVS Veterinary Nurses Council, and Sam Morgan, President of the British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA), to the event. Sean then acknowledged that the recent vote for 'Brexit' would certainly have an effect on some of the actions outlined in the report but affirmed that the RCVS and BVA would be working together to talk to the Government to minimise any disruption during the transition period.

Sean then handed over to Jess French, a recent graduate from the University of Nottingham who is also the presenter of 'Minibeast Adventure with Jess' on the Cbeebies channel, as well as a zoologist, naturalist, conservationist and author. Despite her success as an author and TV presenter, Jess spoke openly about her feelings of being an 'imposter' and unworthy of her success because she is a perfectionist. However, she said she was coming to terms with the fact that she should stop expecting perfection and that veterinary surgeons don't have to feel that they must do everything perfectly but rather to the best of their abilities.

Session one: Leadership

This session was led by two members of the Vet Futures Action Group – Huw Stacey, Director of Clinical Services at the Pets at Home Group, and Chris Tufnell, RCVS Vice-President and Director of Coach House Vets in Berkshire.

Huw Stacey introduced the session by asking delegates about the core components of leadership, identifying them as providing a clear sense of purpose; motivating teams and individuals to work effectively; and, focusing on improvement. Huw spoke about the outcome and wellbeing benefits of having engaged staff in clinical settings – with figures from the NHS suggesting that supportive teams and working environments led to fewer patients dying and fewer staff being absent.

Chris Tufnell then gave an example of what he called 'everyday leadership' where he had made a mistake during a routine operation that had caused harm to an animal. While he was panicking a veterinary nurse

tool control of the situation and helped calm him down as well as talking to the dog's owner to resolve the situation. He then asked for examples of such types of leadership from delegates and these were discussed.

Delegates were told that the RCVS and BVA would now be developing a veterinary leadership programme using the NHS Leadership Academy Healthcare Leadership Model which describes leadership behaviours and helps users across a wide variety of roles to see how they can develop as a leader. The aim is to launch the programme in 2018.

Session two: Graduate outcomes

This session was led by Vet Futures Action Group members Liz Mossop, Associate Professor of Veterinary Education and Sub-Dean for Teaching, Learning and Assessment at the School of Veterinary Medicine and Science at the University of Nottingham, and Helena Diffey, Senior Vice-President of the Association of Veterinary Students UK and Ireland.

Both Liz and Helena gave a potted history of veterinary education – from the foundation of the first vet school in 1791 to the formation of the RCVS in 1844 to the current situation of seven veterinary schools with more universities set to come onboard. Helen spoke about the importance of the move towards a competency-based curriculum and the incorporation of topics such as ethics, business skills and reflective practice. It was agreed that the profession and its educators need to keep developing the curriculum with Helena saying that a move towards more flexible curricula that provided more choice and control was welcome.

Students in the audience agreed with one saying that there needs to be promotion of a wider range of roles while other students in the audience suggested that more focus on business skills and greater emphasis on wellbeing and coping skills were also important.

Delegates were told that the Vet Futures project plans to launch a further, more wide-ranging review to establish the key outcomes required by undergraduate education which will then inform accreditation criteria for UK veterinary schools and result in changes to curricula.

Session three: VN Futures

After a short break Liz Cox, Chair of VN Council, and Sam Morgan, President of the BVNA, gave a presentation on the launch of the VN Futures Report and Action Plan and played a specially-produced **animation** outlining its ambitions and recommendations.

Liz spoke about some of the longstanding issues facing veterinary nursing – particularly around the 'three Rs' of recruitment, retention and returners, highlighting some of the concerns of members of the profession around lack of career progression and salary. However, she said that, while these issues cropped up as part of the VN Futures consultation process, there was also positivity from the profession in terms of how it can contribute to One Health and how nurses can maximise their potential in practice.

Some of the key recommendations of the report were discussed, including the formation of a VN Schools Council; developing greater opportunities for veterinary nurses in areas such as research, academia and business; launching an 'Advanced Nursing Practitioner' status; and, reforming Schedule 3 of the Veterinary Surgeons Act.

Session four: Innovation Symposium

To start the session Vet Futures Action Group member Kimberley Schiller, Manager with Accenture Consulting,

introduced David Doherty, the co-founder of 3GDoctor.com which provides mobile phone video consultations with registered doctors.

David talked about how technology has changed and is changing and encouraged veterinary surgeons to seize the opportunity and engage with the changing technological landscape. Kimberley then told delegates that one of the key actions in the Action Plan was to launch an Innovation Symposium (with the first one taking place in 2018) to showcase new technology in the veterinary medicine and related fields, to celebrate innovators and entrepreneurship, and to inspire day-to-day clinical innovation.

Session five: Careers Hub

Vet Futures Action Group members Clare Allen, Senior Teaching Associate for Curriculum and Innovation at the Department of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Cambridge, and Simon Doherty, Owner and Director of Blackwater Consultancy and animal science expert for the Agri-Tech Organisation of UK Trade & Industry (UKTI), were the presenters for this session.

Clare began by talking about some of the typical paths that young people go down before deciding to become a veterinary surgeon, with early interaction with animals and an interest in science and medicine being key factors. However, she also spoke of a shift in the nature of the profession and the increased role of veterinary surgeons in public health and food production. She then introduced the idea of having an online, accessible 'Career Hub' to provide career advice to schoolchildren, students, new graduates and veterinary surgeons looking for a career change.

A **video** was then introduced featuring members of the Vet Futures Action Group talking about how a veterinary degree was a passport to many different types of career.

Following the video Simon Doherty spoke about how his work with UKTI had led to him becoming involved in programmes to alleviate poverty and improve food security in developing countries and improve human health and wellbeing through controlling animal diseases such as rabies.

International messages

After returning from lunch delegates were shown video messages of support for the Vet Futures project from Dr Andrew Maccabe, Executive Director of the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges, and Christophe Buhot, former President of the Federation of Veterinarians (FVE) of Europe. Gudrun Ravetz, BVA Vice-President, told delegates of how the work of international colleagues had inspired the Vet Futures project and that, as a result, FVE was now working on a new project for Vet Futures Europe.

Session six: Reflective practice

Vet Futures Action Group member Mary Thomson, a practising veterinary surgeon in Devon and a member of the Vetlife Board, introduced Dr David Watt and Dr Ceri Dornan from the Balint Society which helps GPs reach a better understanding of the doctor-patient relationship through reflective techniques.

Mary Thomson gave an example of where the emotional connection between a vet and an elderly client and their animal may affect their clinical judgement in respect of a welfare case. She said that, in cases such as this, the most important thing for individual practitioners and veterinary teams to do is to bring into play reflective practice meaning that the practitioner should stop, think, analyse, evaluate and relate.

Session seven: Animal welfare strategy

James Yeates, Chief Veterinary Officer at the RSPCA and Vet Futures Action Group member, talked about how the actions outlined in the BVA's Animal Welfare Strategy, published in February 2016, meet many of the Vet Futures recommendations.

As part of his presentation he spoke about how, in order to fulfil the strategy, ethics should be integrated into every aspect of working life for a veterinary surgeon and that the ultimate focus should always be an animal's welfare. This tenet should be incorporated not only into clinical practice but also policy-making, education and research.

He suggested that all veterinary surgeons should familiarise themselves with the Animal Welfare Strategy (available from www.bva.org.uk).

Session eight: Veterinary fees and value

Gudrun Ravetz, Vice-President of the BVA, introduced the session by way of a Google search which demonstrated that some of the most commonly asked questions with respect to vets was why they were so expensive. However, she said that veterinary surgeons need to be less shy, and feel less guilty, about making the value of their services clear to clients and charging accordingly, particularly as polling demonstrated that vets are generally trusted by the public.

Gudrun then introduced Jo Rodgers, Brand and Corporate Communications Manager from the Law Society, who spoke about that organisation's consumer campaign to raise the profile of solicitors and let the public know their value in terms of a range of different services.

She then passed back to Gudrun who said that the veterinary profession needed to carry out a similar exercise by using a range of different communication tools to share its 'good news stories' about the services it provides and therefore demonstrate the value of the work.

Feedback and discussion

This session was led by Chris Tufnell and Gudrun Ravetz who revealed the top seven priorities from the Action Plan as voted for by the delegates. In order these were: support the Mind Matters Initiative, the Veterinary Leadership programme, the UK One Health coordination group, the online Careers Hub, the Animal Welfare Strategy, VN Futures and reviewing student recruitment, selection and support.

There was then a wide-ranging discussion in which delegates were encouraged to explain why they had voted for particular priorities over others.

At the end of the discussion delegates were thanked for their input and encouraged to get involved with bringing the actions into fruition by reading the Action Plan, talking to colleagues about it and showing support on social media. Chris Tufnell added that, while the RCVS and BVA have overall responsibility for delivering the actions, it is up to the profession as a whole to take ownership of its future.