



## Loch Leven Equine Practice - Highly Commended

### **Q1. Work Conditions: supporting staff in dealing with the demands of their job**

We recognise how demanding veterinary work can be and how these demands can have a significant impact on all of our team. Whilst we understand that we can't eliminate these from the day to day job we try to give our team the tools necessary to cope with these demands and minimise stressful situations. Below are some examples of how we manage certain situations

Training plays a significant part in this and we have used the VDS Managing Difficult Situations workshops for our reception team to give them the skills to handle initial client complaints. We have a complaints procedure where issues are handed to the Directors to deal with if they cannot be resolved quickly and efficiently. Feedback from the team was that they find complaints difficult and at times stressful so we have removed this role from the administration team unless they are dealing with very basic and easy to resolve complaints.

At CX Congress this year our whole office team attended a lecture on the loss of a pet and how grief can affect clients. This is always a particularly difficult subject for the team to deal with and we recognise the impact of having to regularly deal with grief stricken clients can have on the whole team.

The practice's Health and Safety policy is managed by an external specialist provider with regular reviews and advice when required. Health and Safety training is provided via a dedicated veterinary specific online training platform. Training modules are allocated by the practice to individual team members based on their own roles and requirements. When each module has been completed they are issued with a certificate of achievement. This allows us to ensure that everyone receives the required training as a new employee and then on going over the course of their employment.

Earlier this year we reviewed our protocol for the care of our in-patients as concerns were raised about vets working alone at night in the clinic. A new protocol was implemented where there is now always a nurse on call to help the on call vet and both members should always be present when examining or treating a patient. On site accommodation means both can stay overnight and no one person is left working alone.

## Q2. Balanced Workload: supporting work-life balance

Equine practice can be particularly challenging when it comes to ensuring our team have an appropriate work-life balance. On call is a necessary part of the job and one that at the moment is here to stay. However we do try wherever possible to mitigate the impact of this on our team. All of the vets get half day off each week and our diary is structured so that routine calls are only booked in between 8.30am and 5pm at the latest. All of the vets now have 30 minutes booked into the diary each day for lunch and whilst emergencies will come in, it does allow them sometime to catch up and grab something to eat when out on the road.

Twice a week the vets have a paperwork session booked in the diary to give them some time to catch up on reports and insurance forms.

Question 5 (Control at Work) covers this in more detail but the vets work closely with the office team to ensure their day's calls are manageable and that they have enough time to do the visits and the necessary equipment and nursing support.

We have also implemented a job swap for the day so that each vet spends a day in the office and each member of the office team go out on the road with the vets. This has allowed the office team to appreciate how much time is spent driving and discussing cases with the clients and the vets have gained a good understanding of the pressures the office come under from clients wanting a specific vet, at a specific time, on a specific day.

Feedback from the vets about how the amount of driving can contribute to their stress levels resulted in us introducing zone visit days a few years ago. This has helped reduce the amount of time different vets spend driving to individual calls each week. There are inevitably some clients that want to specify the time and vet and the usual emergencies that we can't plan for but in general this has helped reduce time spent on the road and in turn reduced the vet's frustrations.

We recognise how important time off is and offer additional holiday where every member of the team earns an extra day for each year worked up to 35 days for full time employees.

We had some concerns about the impact of sleep deprivation on the vets after a particularly busy night looking after in patients. Historically vets just had to continue on with their normal day but we had serious concerns especially given the amount of driving equine ambulatory vets are required to do. We have introduced a new protocol which allows the vets to ask for 4 hours to sleep the following morning and the office know that they may need to re-arrange calls if required.

### Q3. Relationships at Work: fostering effective working relationships

Our practice WhatsApp group is a great tool for encouraging positive relationships at work and I have covered this in more detail in Question 6 (Communication at Work).

We run a monthly Employee Of The Month (EOTM) scheme where members of the team submit nominations and at the end of the month a group email is sent round listing all of the nominations and announcing our winner. The nominations can be to congratulate someone for something they did well, thanking somebody for help given or to recognise when someone has gone above and beyond to help the team. The winner is given a certificate and a £25 amazon voucher through Perkbox and we take a photo of them with their certificate to post on the practice Facebook page. I have attached evidence of the nominations and a photo of one of our winners.

The team organise regular social activities, recently there has been a cinema trip, supper out and trips to Edinburgh. Every 2-3 months the directors have pizza night at home using their wood fired pizza oven to cook for everyone. We hold an annual Burn's Night Supper at the practice with team members having to recite Scottish poems and have the annual Christmas party with Secret Santa gifts.

Every birthday in the practice is celebrated with a present from the whole team bought with £5 contributions and a homemade birthday cake.

We made the decision early on to provide lunch for our team as we feel it is really important that they both have access to proper food but it is also a great way to get the team relaxing together over lunch. The practice provides the food and ingredients and our office manager makes us some amazing homemade soups, salads, bacon rolls, quiche, pasta bakes and baked potatoes. Our kitchen/staff room has become the central hub of the practice where people can go and eat, relax and recharge together.

This year we have implemented a protocol where all team members undertake a DISC profiling exercise, which is covered in more detail in Question 7 (Health & Psychological Wellbeing). However this is also relevant to this section as it has been incredibly useful for the whole team to understand both their own but also others preferred methods of communication and has significantly improved relationships between some members of the team. They are more aware that others may communicate something in a different way, either because they have a different communication style or find some situations more challenging.

## Q4. Personal & Career Development: enabling staff to work effectively

As a practice we have always recognised that our people are our most important assets and as a result investment in their development is a significant priority for us.

Monthly 1:2:1 sessions provide regular opportunity to identify CPD, conferences or areas that individuals would like to develop through extra training.

For some of our younger vets we have a structure in place that identifies clinical areas that they would like support with and training sessions are scheduled with senior vets. The office team are made aware of certain procedures where a particular vet may require more support and a protocol is in place where each vet can ask for help with certain procedures. We have built a culture where the senior partner is always available for advice on the telephone should one of the assistants require help or support with a specific case.

In addition to monthly 1:2:1 sessions each member of the team has an annual appraisal. These have evolved over the years depending on who has conducted them and what the objectives have been. When the 1:2:1 sessions were introduced we reviewed the whole process to ensure that the appraisal process is a positive and productive experience for everyone. The focus is on both the team and individual's own development; with the aim of reviewing the business's goals and ensuring everyone is working towards the same thing.

The whole practice has access to a CPD allowance for training that is specific to their personal interests or for areas of improvement that have been identified during an appraisal or 1:2:1. In addition to the annual CPD allowance the practice has organised in house CPD with visiting specialists as well as some training covering Stress in the Workplace and DISC profiling. A further workshop on building resilience is planned for 2018.

The vets and nurses have bi-weekly breakfast meetings where one vet will choose a subject to discuss and provide published papers to support their discussions. There is also an opportunity to review other cases and discuss the outcomes.

This year the whole customer care team attended the CX Congress and each year two members attend the VPMA/SPVS Congress.

We have currently paid for and supported two vets through the RCVS Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Practice, have another enrolled in the system, and have one team member undertaking the Certificate in Veterinary Business Management. One student nurse is about to complete her training to become an RVN and another team member is enrolled to become an SQP with AMTRA.

## Q5. Control at Work: enabling staff to have a say in their work

The practice recognises that lack of control and support at work are two causes of stress at work and therefore actively encourage all team members to look at ways of improving workplace processes. After receiving feedback during meetings with our vets, we recently gave them the option to run their own diaries to give them more control over their days. On this occasion they have chosen not to implement this as they value the work the office team do to arrange appointments for them. Instead we have a protocol where the vets are encouraged to look at their diary several days in advance and if they feel that appointments need to be moved to make sure that their day is achievable from the outset, they will ask the office to do this for them. This has given them more control over their days and whilst everyone is aware that emergencies will come in, they start the day feeling that they can succeed rather than feeling that they are being set up to fail.

Both the nursing and vet teams are given control over their out of hours rota. Everyone is aware that the cover needs to be in place but when rotas have needed to be updated due to staffing changes, the people who are affected by the changes making the amendments to the rota. In addition if a team member has a personal commitment they are free to swop duties as much as is necessary as long as cover is maintained.

We are currently preparing for our Practice Standards Standards inspection and the whole team is involved in the planning and preparation. As a practice we recognise that our team are the people undertaking the work processes on a daily basis and therefore they need to be the people that set the protocols and processes. Management is there to guide and support to ensure that legal requirements are met and the protocols meet the business' goals and objectives but everyone's input is both required and valued.

One of our admin team has just been tasked with reviewing the practice's Faecal Worm Egg Count service. We have agreed certain parameters such as results should be reported within 24 hours, the nurses are to run the samples and until she has qualified as a SQP the vets must report the results with the main objective to increase the number of samples that the practice runs. From this she now has the freedom to develop a system that covers the initial client request through to the testing, reporting, billing and sending of reminders as well as the marketing and advertising of the service.

## Q6. Communication at Work

We use several different methods of communication at work. We hold regular inter-team meetings where a member from the office, nursing and vet team meets with the practice manager to discuss any issues, successes and projects that are planned. Each team is invited to submit items for the agenda before the meeting and minutes are circulated afterwards to the whole practice team.

Bi-monthly practice meetings are held to discuss bigger projects or areas of significant change. These are usually held first thing and breakfast is always provided.

Each member of the team has a monthly 1:2:1 meeting with the practice manager which provides an opportunity to discuss any planned changes, projects or issues that the team member may have. These have been incredibly successful at encouraging small issues to be raised before they become bigger problems and all of the team feel they can have an open, honest and sometimes frank discussion.

The practice has a WhatsApp group set up which is used to communicate amongst the whole team. This is used to notify people of a particular situation and some examples would be; if a horse is being admitted late at night, lab results which need to be reported, if one of the vets is running late they will often message to ask the office to call their next visit, to congratulate someone on a particular success or just to say thank you (Evidence is attached)

We use group email for more formal communication. Due to two vets leaving suddenly this year, we were short staffed for quite a period of time whilst we were recruiting. Email was used to keep everyone up to date with the situation, when we had interviewees coming or locums arranged and when we finally found the right permanent team members information about them and their start dates was sent to everyone in the practice. This resulted in the whole team knowing exactly what the current situation was and who was covering any shortages in the on-call rota at the time.

A couple of years ago we introduced something called the '24 hour rule' after a lecture at the SPVS/VPMA Congress. This aims to create an environment where individual team members feel they can raise an issue without any come back or recriminations. There are three conditions to the rule, the first is that an issue must be raised in a constructive and polite way, secondly it should only be addressed to the people directly involved and not made public to the rest of the team and finally it must be raised within 24 hours of the incident. Examples would be coming into the kitchen at 6pm on Friday to find a sink full of washing up that everyone else has left, or the vets leaving an explosion of kit and used consumables for the nurses to clear up. Experience has shown us that it is often these little issues that start building resentment if they aren't addressed.

## Q7. Health & Psychological Wellbeing

We have a structured and detailed Health & Safety policy that incorporates regular training that has already been discussed in Question 1. The effectiveness of the veterinary specific training encourages a culture where the safety of our team and people around them is paramount. Training covers manual handling at work and back related injuries, the safe handling of animals, stress in the work place and much more. We have also arranged additional in house training with Gemma Pearson MRCVS who specialises in horses with behavioural issues and showed us methods to handle these horses and safely overcome their issues.

At the beginning of the year, the whole team was issued with an anonymous HSE Indicator Tool questionnaire that was specific to their role in the practice. The aim was to identify and reduce factors that were causing the team stress and enhance their wellbeing. Each team member was interviewed and asked to describe the challenges they face at work. A report was generated with recommendations and suggested improvements. A follow up meeting was held with all team members where the outcome of the survey and recommendations were discussed and an action plan generated. These surveys will be undertaken on an annual basis.

Every team member has completed a DISC profile with the aim of understanding what drives us, how we cope with stress and the effect and impact of our behaviour and communication style has on others. The team really enjoyed comparing each other's differences and were able to understand how stressful situations can affect people's behaviour. Each DISC profile is available in the staff room and in the practice manager's office for the whole team to view (permission has been given). As part of the practice's H&S stress policy all new team members under take DISC profiling.

Resources have been allocated for specific training on managing stress and building resilience, with in house training arranged for March 2018. The practice has also offered support with personal coaching to certain vets and this will continue to be offered should an individual need this extra help and support.

As a practice we have an incredibly low absence rate and such is their dedication to their job, we usually have to tell our team to go home if they are sick. We provide voluntary annual flu vaccinations for the whole team and as discussed in Question 3 healthy lunches for the whole team. We understand that work can be incredibly busy sometimes and it is easy for people to forget to eat or grab a fizzy drink and packet of crisps at the petrol station. We aim to have a fully stocked kitchen with home cooked meals to make sure there is always a healthy option available.

As part of the practice's membership to Perkbox all of the team have access to a wellness platform that hosts home workouts, yoga classes, cookery classes and a section dedicated to mindfulness as well as discounted gym memberships and dental and health insurance policies.