



Bath Veterinary Group

CASE STUDY

LARGE PRACTICE
HIGHLY COMMENDED

1. Promoting physical and psychological health at work

Promoting colleagues' physical and psychological health at work supports wellbeing.

1.1 What health and safety policies and procedures are in place in your practice?

Give brief details and an example

All staff are made aware of the company H&S policy, this is reviewed on an annual basis.
All new employees have a H&S induction and have access to all H&S policies, risk assmt, H&S handbook.
All staff complete H&S training on-line including manual handling, fire safety, slips trips falls.
All accidents are recorded and reviewed annually. We have trained first aiders and fire wardens.

1.2 What health initiatives are promoted by the practice (e.g healthy eating, exercise, relaxation, access to natural light and fresh air)?

Give brief details and an example

Activities are planned throughout the year to encourage exercise, relaxation and connecting with others (yoga, football, rugby, basketball, reflexology). In March a team ran Bath half marathon and raised money for Vetlife. We also have a Christmas party and Summer BBQ. We are also organising a craft evening. These events are funded by the practice. All staff are encouraged to take their breaks, we have an outdoor seating area and staff can bring their dogs into work. We also have a quiet corner for staff to have quiet time away from the practice. All employees have access to discounted gym membership and cycle to work scheme. Vets have private healthcare.

1.3 Is awareness of mental health promoted by the practice, and how?

Give brief details and an example

Most of our staff have attended Wellbeing and resilience training. We have Vetlife and MH posters displayed around the practice. We also have information available on how to support colleagues if they are suffering with anxiety/depression. We have 6 Wellbeing Champions across the group. The company has funded counseling sessions for some employees, access to Occupational Health is also available. We have a quiet corner for anyone wanting to relax in a quiet and private area of the hospital. We have 8 Mental Health First Aiders within the company, this 2 day course was funded by the company. We are taking part in the RCVS pilot of Schwartz rounds to understand how some of our cases/clients impact our teams. We talk openly about mental health and line managers support their teams.

1.4 What stress management initiatives are promoted by the practice?

Give brief details and an example

We organise a number of events/activities (as above) to encourage the 5 steps to wellbeing. The management team are approachable and will help support the teams wherever possible. If it is a particularly busy day, the line managers will seek help from other surgeries. All staff are encouraged to speak to their line manager if they are feeling stressed/tired. Workload and working hours are discussed at annual appraisals and interim reviews. We have introduced bathroom boxes - different products are available to help you feel fresh and reduce stress during the day. We have a flexible working policy and encourage a good work/life balance. Unpaid leave and sabbaticals are also considered and approved. Stress risk assessments are also carried out where appropriate.

1.5 Are colleagues supported during extended sickness absence and on return to work?

Give brief details and an example

HR or line managers maintain regular contact with the team member. Contact is made at least on a weekly basis to discuss the employees condition and to discuss any work related matters. The method of contact and frequency is discussed and agreed with the staff member. A return to work interview is mandatory for all sickness absence. The reasons for absence are discussed in detail. The practice will consider adjustments to their role and working hours. A physio has visited the practice and offered discounted tx. One of our vets was absent due to anxiety/depression. A phased return was agreed and she then requested a permanent change in working pattern. This was agreed within a 3 month period. The vet is happier with her new working hours and her mental health and attendance has improved.

1.6 Any additional comments on support of physical and mental health within your practice?

(maximum 150 words)

The practice understands the importance of good physical and mental health and how this can affect productivity and attendance in the work place. We encourage and fund various activities to help promote activity and good mental health. We recently arranged 'stay interviews' to understand the level of employee satisfaction and engagement. During the interviews staff were asked for any suggestions on improvements that could be made within the workplace. We believe employees want to work in an environment that cares about their needs and feelings. We are currently preparing a report to give everyone feedback from the stay interviews. We are soon introducing Schwartz rounds, this is a reflective practice forum for staff to discuss the emotional aspects of caring for patients and dealing with clients. The rounds has been proven to reduce stress and isolation of staff within the NHS. We are encouraging staff that are interested in more environmentally sustainable ways to work to forward their ideas.

2. Relationships at work

Co-operation, information sharing, and supportiveness among colleagues are important not just for effective working but also contribute to wellbeing. Good relationships among colleagues can also help people to cope with stressful aspects of their work.

2.1 Do colleagues have opportunities to take *shared* breaks together during the working day?

If you do not employ any of the job roles listed below, please tick not applicable

Vets: yes sometimes no not applicable

Nurses: yes sometimes no not applicable

Reception staff: yes sometimes no not applicable

Support staff: yes sometimes no not applicable

2.2 Does the practice provide opportunities for colleagues to spend time together outside work, if they wish? Do these involve activities to suit different interests and preferences (e.g. people who might prefer to avoid alcohol)? *Give brief details*

As above - Activities are planned throughout the year to encourage exercise, relaxation and connecting with others eg yoga, football, rugby, basketball, reflexology sessions. In March a team ran a half marathon and raised money for Vetlife. We also have a Christmas party and Summer BBQ. All of these events are funded by the practice. We are also looking into organising a book club and craft event. We have a staff Facebook group (closed) for staff to organise their own social events too. Some team members regularly meet for a run (with their dogs!). A Halloween party was organised by one of our vets and nurses.

2.3 What mechanisms are used to identify and address any difficulties or conflict between colleagues? *Give brief details and an example*

Line managers regularly meet with their teams, they also meet on a 1:1 basis. We carry out a 360 degree review process for appraisals. The management team have received training in people management and having difficult conversations. Teams are encouraged to speak to their manager if they are having any difficulties at work. Informal or formal complaints are investigated and dealt with appropriately. We recently introduced a staff respect charter to encourage a supportive working environment as we felt the teams were not working collaboratively.

2.4 Does the practice have a clear policy relating to harassment and bullying at work, including processes for managing allegations of harassment or bullying? *Give brief details and an example*

We have an Anti-Harassment/Bullying policy. We are committed to ensuring equal opportunities and fair treatment in the work place. Managers and the HR team will treat all complaints of harassment or bullying seriously, investigate them promptly, efficiently and in confidence. A complaint was received regarding misconduct in the workplace. The complaint was fully investigated and witness statements taken. The matter was discussed with the employee and dealt with accordingly. Training was also offered. All staff are aware that any bullying/harassment will not be tolerated.

2.5 Any additional comments on support of relationships within your practice? *(maximum 150 words)*

We encourage social events and recognise the benefits of good working relationships. We have a gratitude book in our staff room, this is an opportunity for staff to say thank you to their colleagues. We also have an employee of the month award. The winner is announced to all staff and the employee receives a small gift. On International Day of Happiness we asked all staff to write an anonymous note to a colleague explaining why they enjoy working with them and how they inspire you in the work place. This help build some relationships within the team and the feedback was positive so we will be organising the event again next year.

3. Communication at work

Ensuring that colleagues are informed about what is happening at work, and are able to have a say in how work is carried out, contribute to wellbeing. Effective communication is particularly important during periods of change at work.

3.1 Do colleagues meet regularly – i.e. daily or weekly – to discuss day-to-day work matters? *Give brief details and an example*

A breakfast meeting is held at 8.45am Mon - Fri to discuss the workload for the day and any client related queries. Daily ward rounds are held to discuss inpatient care- first opinion and referral vets/nurses attend. Our clinical care committee meet monthly to discuss clinical procedures. Mortality and morbidity meetings are held. We have regular team meetings; nurse meetings (every 3mths), vet meetings (4-6mths), admin meetings (2-3wks), surgery reps meetings (bimonthly), directors meetings (monthly), individual surgery meetings (monthly), reception meetings(monthly), referral meeting (2-3mth).

3.2 In the last six months, approximately how many meetings have been held at work for the following groups? *Specify number, or write n/a if not applicable.*

Vets:

Nurses:

Reception staff:

Support staff:

3.3 Apart from meetings, what other communication channels for colleagues are used in the practice? *Give brief details and an example*

Telephone - including internal connection system, Work emails (Outlook), Internal PM system (Voyager), Private Facebook group, Whatsapp groups
Daily rounds and breakfast meeting
Staff can put a note in the suggestion box (anonymously), the comments are discussed at the Practice Management meeting and feedback is given in writing for all staff to view. We also send a monthly bulletin to all staff with practice news and events.

3.4 Are all members of the practice team able to have a say in how work is carried out? *Give brief details and an example*

Staff are encouraged to submit any suggestions/improvements within the practice. We have a suggestion box in the practice and the comments are discussed at the monthly management meeting. The management team will listen to any suggestions from their team and discuss any change in protocols. The Clinical Care Committee discuss ways to improve clinical protocols and any adverse reactions.

3.5 How do you communicate with staff on extended absence (e.g parental leave, sickness)? *Give brief details and an example*

HR or line managers will maintain contact during any extended period of absence. The method of contact is agreed with the staff member but it is usually via email. It is important that the team member has a return to work meeting and they are informed of any changes within the work place as this will help their return to work go more smoothly. HR maintained contact with a receptionist while on maternity leave, she was given refresher training on her return to work and a risk assessment was carried out due to her experiencing some back pain, this also helped her feel more supported.

3.6 Any additional comments on support of effective communication within your practice?
(maximum 150 words)

Effective communication is important to maintain good customer service, excellent clinical standards and improve team relationships. There are various ways to communicate within the practice and team meetings are held regularly. Minutes from team meetings are available on the PM system so all staff can refer to the notes.

We recently asked our vets how they would like us to communicate 'housekeeping' points, it was suggested that a monthly staff newsletter is sent via email. This was introduced in November.

Our PM holds a meeting every 6 -8 weeks with a representative from each site, this has helped improve communication and gives teams an opportunity to meet staff from other areas of the business.

4. Career development

Support for professional and career development, such as supervision, training, and constructive feedback on performance, are important both for effectiveness at work and wellbeing.

4.1 How often are appraisals carried out for colleagues in the following groups?
If you do not employ any of the job roles below, please write 'not applicable'.

New Graduate Vets:

Student Veterinary Nurses:

Vets:

Nurses:

Reception staff:

Support staff:

4.2 Is induction support provided for new colleagues in the following groups?
If you do not employ any of the job roles listed below, please tick not applicable

Vets: yes no not applicable

Nurses: yes no not applicable

Reception staff: yes no not applicable

Support staff: yes no not applicable

Staff returning from absence:
(e.g illness, parental leave, travel) yes no not applicable

Locum/temporary staff: yes no not applicable

4.3 Are there any mentorship schemes or other support schemes in place for staff? If so, which groups? (e.g new graduates)

Give brief details

We have a 2 year new graduate vet scheme. The vet spends the first month of employment off of the rota and has a thorough induction into the practice. They have a dedicated clinical coach who helps support them with their clinical skills. They also attend 10 CPD days per annum.

We employ 4 student nurses. They have a nominated clinical coach and receive regular inhouse training.

We also have a Nurse Academy for newly qualified nurses and Nurse Refresher scheme for nurses returning to the profession after a period of absence.

4.4 Does the practice support relevant clinical development training for colleagues in the following groups?

If you do not employ any of the job roles listed below, please tick not applicable.

For each group where you have answered yes, give an example

Vets: yes no not applicable

We have a CPD policy and encourage a culture of CPD and employee development. Training and development opportunities are discussed at annual appraisals.

Vets are given a £1200 per annum/ 5 days CPD allowance. We also consider CPD applications for further study/certificate applications. Referral vets are entitled to £2000 per annum for CPD.

We arrange regular lunch and learns (eg Alphaxan, Dental training, Royal Canin, Suturing, Galliprant, Cypoint). We have a number of vets studying for certificates eg ECC and BSAVA Medicine cert.

We also arrange evening CPD/meetings for vets.

Nurses: yes no not applicable

Nurses are given an annual CPD budget of £550/3 days.

We organise regular lunch and learns (eg K laser training, bandaging angels and First Aid)

Training and development is discussed at appraisals.

Training agreements are available for further study/ certificates.

A nurse at our cat clinic recently enrolled onto a Feline Behaviour certificate and signed a 1 year training agreement with the practice. We also arrange evening CPD/meetings for nurses.

Receptionists: yes no not applicable

Support staff are entitled to £100 CPD allowance. Training and development needs are discussed at appraisals and interim reviews. Receptionists are required to attend 2 days training with Onswitch - this covers customer care and telephone training.

We organise regular lunch and learns (within the last 6 months - Royal Canin, Nexguard Spectra, animal handling, first aid and Petplan insurance).

Receptionists have also attended wellbeing & resilience training and managing difficult conversations.

4.5 Does the practice support relevant non-clinical development training for colleagues in the following groups?

If you do not employ any of the job roles listed below, please tick not applicable.

For each group where you have answered yes, give an example

Vets: yes no not applicable

Vets have attended wellbeing and resilience training. We are also arranging for some of our vets to attend the VDS Managing difficult conversations training.
Inhouse training includes health and safety, fire training, insurance training, debt protocols.
Senior vets have attended appraiser training.
Clinical coaches have attended coaching training.
Some of our vets have attended Mental First Aid training (2 day course). Practice Manager and Clinical Directors attended SPVS congress last year.

Vet Nurses: yes no not applicable

Nurses have attended wellbeing and resilience training. We are also arranging for some of our nurses to attend the VDS Managing difficult conversations training.
Inhouse training includes health and safety, fire training, insurance training, debt protocols.
Senior nurses have attended appraiser training.
Clinical coaches have attended coaching training.
Some of our nurses have attended Mental First Aid training (2 day course).

Reception staff: yes no not applicable

Reception staff have attended wellbeing and resilience training. Our senior receptionists have attended the VDS Managing difficult conversations training.
Inhouse training includes health and safety, fire training, insurance training, debt protocols, taking payments with confidence, the exceptional receptionist. Senior receptionists will be attending SPVS congress.
Senior receptionists have attended appraiser training.

Support staff: yes no not applicable

Support staff have attended wellbeing and resilience training. Senior managers have attended the VDS Managing difficult conversations training.
Inhouse training includes health and safety, fire training, insurance training, debt protocols.
Management team have attended appraiser training. PM and one Clinical Director will be attending SPVS congress.
HR Manager has completed CIPD training and attendance management training.

4.6 How are good performance and colleagues' achievements recognised by the practice?

Give brief details and an example

We have an 'employee of the month award'. The nominations are made anonymously and the employee receives a small gift and email from the Directors to recognise their efforts.
If a member of the team passes an exam an email/gift is sent to say congratulations and their pay is also reviewed.
Positive client reviews are sent to all staff.
We have a gratitude book in the staff room for staff to leave comments regarding their colleagues.
We offer a prize to practices with the most improved mystery shopping score

4.7 Any additional comments on support of professional and career development within your practice? (*maximum 150 words*)

All of our vacancies are advertised internally and we encourage progression within our teams. Career development and training is discussed at appraisals. We offer training agreements for further study/certificates.

One of our vets joined the practice as a new graduate, on completion of the graduate scheme she moved into a hospital role and informed her manager that she had a medicine interest. The company funded and supported her medicine certificate and she now works full time with our referral team.

6 of our vets and 3 nurses regularly work with the 'Street Vet' project. We have made changes to some of their rotas to enable them to continue their charity work as they enjoy this role and it makes them feel good.

5. Workload and work scheduling

Veterinary work can involve high workload, long working days, and working unsocial hours, including on-call working. Managing these effectively is important for wellbeing.

5.1 Do colleagues have opportunities for regular breaks during the working day?

If you do not employ any of the job roles listed below, please tick not applicable

Vets: yes sometimes no not applicable

Nurses: yes sometimes no not applicable

Reception staff: yes sometimes no not applicable

Support staff: yes sometimes no not applicable

5.2 Are individuals' workloads monitored and, if necessary, revised?

Give brief details and an example

Workloads are discussed at annual appraisals and interim reviews. Support from the management team is offered during busy periods and we encourage a team work culture.

In April we reduced vets working hours from 4.5 days per week to 4 days per week to provide a better work/life balance.

Due to an increase in staffing numbers the HR manager was struggling with her workload. A HR assistant was employed on a part time basis, this has helped the HR manager with her workload but also provided more HR support for the company and staff.

5.3 Do work schedules allow adequate recovery from work between one working day and the next?

Give brief details and an example

We have a dedicated night team (1 night vet, 1 twilight vet, 1 night nurse, 1 twilight nurse, 1 kennel assistant and an evening receptionist) to ensure staff get adequate rest between shifts and patients are provided with 24 hour care. Day staff have a minimum of 12 hours break between shifts. We encourage staff to try and leave on time. Any overtime is recorded and can be taken as time off in lieu. We regularly review our rotas and ask for feedback from staff. We have recently changed our night vet rotas from 7 on/7 off to 5 on/10 off and employed a 3rd night vet as the vets found the rota too tiring.

5.4 How is colleagues' work-life balance supported?

Give brief details and an example

We try to spread the workload between our surgeries so staff finish their shifts on time. We have a dedicated night team and we arrange locum cover for their holiday, sickness cover and xmas party. The referral on call rota is shared between the team. Personal commitments will be taken into account. We have a flexible working policy and will consider part time working hours. We have also supported sabbaticals and requests for unpaid leave. We offer an additional day off for birthday leave and holiday entitlement increases with length of service. We have recently agreed for one of our vets to finish earlier so she can collect her child from nursery.

5.5 Any additional comments on support of workload and work scheduling within your practice?

(maximum 150 words)

We understand that working in a veterinary practice can be a busy, demanding role so it is important that staff get the support and rest they need. If a staff member is looking tired or feeling stressed we will discuss ways to help them and offer some time off. We have increased our staffing levels within the hospital to help with the increase work load. We have changed the night vet rotas and day rotas to allow more time off work. This has been at a significant cost to the business but we feel it is important for vets wellbeing. We have also increased the number of nurse consulting sessions to take some pressure off the consulting vets.

6. Work Demands & Work Conditions

Veterinary work can involve specific demands, such as working with distressed or discourteous clients, patient cases that are stressful, and lone working. Managing these demands effectively supports wellbeing.

6.1 Is training in working with clients provided for team members?

Vets: yes no not applicable

Nurses: yes no not applicable

Reception staff: yes no not applicable

Support staff: yes no not applicable

6.2 How are colleagues supported in the event of client complaints?

Give brief details and an example

We have a complaints policy that is available on our practice website. The PM, Hospital Manager and Client Care Manager deal with any client complaints, they will investigate the complaint and respond to the client promptly. They will also discuss the complaint with the team member and support them through the process. We encourage team members to support each other with difficult cases. Following the complaint, any training requirements or change of protocols are discussed with the line manager.

6.3 How are colleagues supported in the event of clients being abusive or threatening?

Give brief details and an example

If colleagues feel threatened they are advised to seek help and call the police if necessary. Safety is always the priority. Vets/Nurses making house visits are always accompanied by a colleague and if clients become abusive we will consider sacking the client from the practice.

A receptionist in a branch surgery felt threatened by an abusive client so we made changes to the rota so the receptionist/vet didn't have to work alone. We have also installed CCTV into some of our practices.

Notices are displayed in the reception areas to advise clients that threatening/abusive behaviour will not be tolerated.

6.4 How are colleagues who may spend time working alone supported?

Give brief details and an example

It is important for lone workers to feel supported so they are invited to regular team meetings/training and our social events etc. They can send any queries via the PM system or call the management team.

They have regular meetings with their line managers to discuss any concerns they may have.

6.5 Any additional comments on support of work demands within your practice?

(maximum 150 words)

We arrange interim reviews with our teams and discuss work loads. Additional support and training is provided as required.

Our reception teams reported that they were feeling rushed when speaking to clients and were feeling stressed due to the large volume of calls and noise in the reception area. We decided to move our phone calls to a separate part of the building to give receptionists more time to speak to clients in a quieter environment. The receptionists have reported that the changes have made the working environment more comfortable and they feel less stressed.

We have also changed our night vet rotas as we received feedback that the rota was too tiring. We changed the shift pattern from 7 on/7 off to 5 on/10 off and this has been well received.