



# Watkins & Tasker

## CASE STUDY

**MEDIUM 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*

We have a full and robust set of health and safety policies ranging from risk assessments for tasks/areas to specific policies on stress and alcohol/drug misuse. These are shared with all staff and regularly updated. We also have lots of Standard Operating Protocols to keep our staff safe such as local rules for radiography and cytotoxic drug handling. Staff are involved with the amendment of these to ensure that they understand and they cover their requirements.

## 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*

We actively encourage staff to have breaks and where the rota allow share these breaks in staff rooms we have. There are a dog walk and running group within the Practice who organise regular activities outside of work. The provision of showering facilities means staff often exercise prior to work, on their lunch break or immediately after finishing. While cake does feature quite heavily within our Practice (for which we make no excuse) we also provide fresh fruit, access to healthier drink choices and always avoid "beige buffets" for staff meetings. During the summer the team are often found outside the Practice during breaks (with ice lollies) making the most of our nature areas where we have wild flowers to encourage bees and butterflies. Within the staff rooms there are our message boards which the team create their own quizzes such as "kind word Scrabble", "I am thankful for..." or "I love my job because..."

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

*Give brief details and an example*

Mental Health Awareness Training has been provided to 17 (out of 43) staff members from every role area. There are 2 members of staff undertaking further extensive Mental Health First Aid Training. A Mindfulness evening was also held at the Practice. We have an Employee Assistance Programme which can offer confidential support around a variety of issues ranging from grief to financial issues. We have done a series of social media publicity surrounding how staff are supported including personal accounts and highlighting the associated issues within the industry - this was well received by the clients and helped several staff members share their stories. There are several other support options from our bi-monthly staff appraisals to informal check-ins. There are posters around the Practice with additional support information and new staff are also provided a "mentor" as a point of contact.

## 1.4 What stress management initiatives are promoted by the practice?

*Give brief details and an example*

Everyone deals with stress differently and as such while a stress management policy has been created within the Practice we want staff to also be free to manage their stress in a way which suits them. When it suits someone they are able to discuss issues with their managers and this may result in changes to their hours or duties. We have a very flexible approach which means that individuals are respected and solutions can be found. We have a set of Practice ethos which include speaking about others as if they were in the room which means respect is shown preventing negativity which helps with stress management. We adopt a "blame the system not the person" approach when errors occur so we can ensure that stress which could be created in these instances is minimised. The ethos of the Practice is discussed regularly at branch and full Practice meetings.

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

*Give brief details and an example*

Staff who experience an extended absence are supported in variety of ways. Recently a staff member has had a phased return where working hours were built up over a period of four months at their pace to assist with their recovery. Their duties and role were assessed on a weekly basis to ensure that they were able to undertake these and were happy before discussing the next step. This support does not stop when they are back to where they are prior to their absence and is very much a two way process. The team are a like a family so ensure that support is given and if someone is struggling that a solution is found or rest period offered. We have also sourced additional support when a staff member injured their elbow as although deemed fit to work after extended leave they needed assistance with a number of tasks so a previous placement student was offered a temporary role to "be their right arm... literally!"

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

*(maximum 150 words)*

To us the welfare, mental and physical health of our team are paramount to everything we do at our Practice. We pride ourselves on the initiatives and support we offer and continually look at new ways to do this. We feel that we also have a duty of care to our team to explain to clients about the challenges we face and information regarding standards of behaviour to our team are available at each site. Communication is at the very heart of the Practice and therefore mental health is not stigmatised which can encourage those who are struggling to be more open. Everyone has "hidden" challenges and we hope our safe support network allows staff the opportunity to deal with these effectively. From something simple as a "secret" signal to give to each other if they are having a bad day/in need of support to our social media campaign to raise overall awareness of mental health, our Practice has a robust basis in place.

## 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*

There are so many opportunities for colleagues to spend time together outside of work. The team regularly organise trips such as go-karting, "locked room" experiences, cinema trips, meals out, horse riding and as mentioned above dog walks and runs. Summer and Christmas get-togethers are also very popular. They also do charity events such as local raft race or dog shows. Many of the team also compete together in fly-ball and agility. Plus we arrange many evening training sessions which are voluntary and only loosely connected to work including Sighted Guide Training by Guide Dog Association and a self defence class. Currently the two staff on maternity leave also meet up regularly with their babies and other staff with kids.

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

There are both formal and informal means of identifying any conflict. The more formal approach is when someone raises a complaint to their line manager or informally it may be that a third party has spotted an issue and decided to put steps in place to sort this. Difficulties between colleagues are resolved quickly, fairly and in calm manner. Again we refer back to our ethos of looking at any system failures before blaming an individual as many issues arising can often be tracked back to this such as lack of understanding about a task may be due to inadequate training. The branch meetings are also used as a neutral space for airing any general concerns or provide solutions to things with potential to cause conflict.

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*

Our policy on harassment and bullying is clearly laid out within our Practice Manual which is provided to all new staff, available from every computer in the Practice and in hard-copy at each site. There is a clear hierarchical reporting system with steps made clear for all concerned. All staff also have the option to consult the advice of a HR Consultant who can facilitate neutral meetings but we are fortunate that we have never had to implement any of our more formal policies regarding harassment or bullying as we find these can be resolved by communication.

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

Our team really are like a family and while issues do occur these are resolved before formal managerial intervention. However, our policies are reinforced by clear communication and a Practice ethos that everyone understands and is an inclusive part of.

### 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*

All of the teams decided daily on a plan for the day such as who is doing what role or procedure/case. This is then recorded on a board in the Prep Areas so everyone is clear. We have informal weekly catch up meetings on different projects or with staff on certain topics. We then have one-to-ones (staff appraisals) every other month and branch meetings falling in the month without appraisals. We also have Practice Meetings where whole team get together every 4-5month and a Practice Development Team which represent every sector of the business who currently meet monthly to plan overall goals, aims and direction of the Practice - outcomes from these are shared with all staff (appropriately). (Not inc L&Ls)

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*

All staff have access to our PMS which includes internal communication messaging which is used as main communication method. There are many prompts which our PMS can also assist with such as task reminders. Nearly all of the qualified staff have individual email addresses while the rest have access to the Practice generic emails. Staff are encouraged to use appropriate means of communication so internal phone system is also popular. We also have a private Facebook group for emergency out of hours queries and another for organising social events as this can be seen by many people quickly. The most weight is put on good verbal face to face communication. Clinical review of cases also happen.

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*

All members of the Practice team are asked for input and ideas. There is a good practice of idea sharing amongst the branches to improve services. When staff attend CPD this is particularly vital so a report about key learning points is circulated so everyone can benefit. Staff are asked to share ideas as soon as they have them and not leave it until next formal appraisal. For bigger projects such as recent addition of a tablet option onto our Pet Health Club the input from every team member was essential. Everyone has different roles so everyone's viewpoint and priority around systems was different. This led to a smooth implementation as all the scenarios had been considered.

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

A plan is agreed with staff on extended or parental leave and is tailored to the individual. Currently for the two staff on maternity leave they have requested emails be sent to them regarding any large practice changes or events such as socials or photo shoots. They are also arranging the KIT days to spend time in the Practice before coming back to work. No pressure is put on staff about this subject but also aware that their colleagues via the Facebook social page keep everyone full updated about things going on. We also ensure that staff returning from a long period away from Practice have time to re-familiarise with protocols, computer systems and have a meeting with their line manager to discuss any significant changes.

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

It was extremely difficult to provide numbers for the meetings so have included formal ones only as if included all smaller meetings on day to day management or particular projects, in-house/external lunch and learns and "quick chats" it could be excessive.

When communicating staff are also asked to consider tone, content and their audience to ensure that their message is not misinterpreted or sent to the wrong people. The communication amongst colleagues is also shown in the "gold-standard" and "exceptional" awards that we have both for clinical elements but also for our customer service.

## 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: weekly >monthly

Student Veterinary Nurses: Weekly

Vets: Two monthly

Nurses: Two monthly

Reception staff: Two monthly

Support staff: Two monthly

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*

All staff know clearly who their line manager is and who can offer additional support. Our new graduate (who knew the team due to EMS placements) has been provided a clinical mentor and also access to the Practice Manager for any non-clinical support. This helps to support both sides to the role of being a NQ vet. Depending on their role new staff will spend time with the Reception Manager or Head Nurse with frequent formal and informal check points. New but experienced vets are placed alongside long-employed team with a central point of contact being the Senior Vet who can guide on clinical aspects.

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

Our approach to CPD (including clinical development) may be considered strange. We do not set personal amounts per Vet. Instead we explain that if they have an interest, can make a personal plan and business case then we will approve. Guidance is then provided and as an example a vet suggested they undertake a PgCert in Ophthalmology with the business case of "it's cheaper than other certificates". While this was the case, management saw that the vet was wanting to progress but being constrained by perception of their worth. After discussion, the vet is now undertaking a PgCert in Surgery which is an area of passion. All Vets have individualised Personal Development Plans which outlines both clinical and personal goals.

Nurses:  yes  no  not applicable

As per the vets they are given opportunity to undertake training course of interest. We also arrange for membership of appropriate professional bodies and utilise lots of online learning platforms including Boehringer Academy, Webinar Vet and ISFM. Personal Development Plans are currently being created for all of the nurses. Our trainee VNs spend study days in the Practice so they have access to these resources and the library of manuals plus can spend time with their clinical coaches undertaking specific clinical training. Our Clinical Director has also undertaken various in-house training sessions including "the crashed patient" with hands on demo scenarios.

Receptionists:  yes  no  not applicable

We believe that a client is just as likely to ask a Receptionist about a flea/worming treatment, we invest a lot of time into ensuring that our Reception team feel comfortable with these elements. As an example, during the implementation of a tablet option on our Pet Health Club earlier this year we tailored lunch and learns to the reception team. This meant they understood the clinical benefits fully. Every member of the team are encouraged to spend time experiencing new services or refreshing their memory about existing ones such as our Rehabilitation Services or watching a laparoscopic procedure . Again there is no set budget placed on their development.

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

Same overall approach as clinical development. We have a business coach who is spending time working on communication and personality typing to assist with vet\* interaction with clients (\*relevant to whole team as everyone undertaking). The Personal Development Plans are split into two sections personal development and clinical and may include training or support in being more organised, dealing with difficult situations or assistance with "imposter" syndrome.

Vet Nurses:  yes  no  not applicable

As previously mentioned we support clinical and non-clinical development of every member of the team. One Head Nurse has recently undertaken a course on communication and building effective teams. This was online with web-conferencing. The result has not just seen personal improvement but has made a cultural shift across whole practice as people mirror this. Other training has also included Social Media and Mental Health Awareness.

Reception staff:  yes  no  not applicable

Again all staff needs are looked at and training on computer systems, health and safety and communication is provided. All staff when starting employment undertake 10 online modules including telephone answering, dealing with complaints and pet bereavement. Our customer service standards are "outstanding" so regular refreshers are organised by the Reception Manager and include real scenarios as the basis.

Support staff:  yes  no  not applicable

Training opportunities are offered to every member of the team and the support staff team attend both the clinical and non-clinical training organised as they are an integral part of the Practice. However, most of these staff have the skills needed to undertake their job e.g. appropriate accounting qualifications. If they have CPD requirements for these they are supported in achieving this. Our Accounts Administrator recently undertook the Sighted Guide Training due to personal interest and sat in on a lunch and learn about our Health Plans.

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

*Give brief details and an example*

There are several KPIs which are monitored for the clinical team. Performance and all the small impacts are taken into account and discussed at their appraisals. We have a client review system and particularly excellent reviews or if a staff member is mentioned by name these are sent to whole team with a personal comment from the management. Staff often receive praise from their colleagues or management about their performance and we ask that this is shared to all via our PMS. Quiet thank yous, a bottle of wine/gin, bunch of flowers or cake are also common. We do not have a formal "Staff member of the week/month" as found these went to same group and so this more public and inclusive approach was adopted.

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

Our business has the team at it's core and we know that part of being happy in a role includes access to personal development and see this as inclusive for all members of the team regardless of their specific role. We love to develop people and our attitude to CPD is more "why wouldn't you want to". Our recruitment strategy focuses on people as skills can be trained and lack of them shouldn't be a barrier as we see this can be easily rectified. Many of our staff started with us a school age volunteers and are now one of our Head Nurses or our fully qualified hydrotherapist who had no professional qualifications prior to undertaking the hydro training. We have supported two Vets to become Advance Practitioners and currently funding three others to undertake PgCerts. From next year we will have a total of 7 out of 11 vets with additional qualifications. Many of our nurses also hold certificates including Exotics, Anesthesia and Radiography.

## 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 monitored as part of our bi-monthly appraisal meeting but can be tweaked between these as necessary. When a staff member leaves or changes their rota the workloads are reviewed and reallocated to ensure that they are achievable. Task sharing and daily/weekly/monthly job lists are available for everyone to see so if someone is struggling this can be quickly reallocated. Even jobs such as cleaning the staff rooms are fairly allocated and monitored in case someone needs help - we are a team!

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

*Give brief details and an example*

When building rotas we take into account recovery time and personal circumstances. These can be fairly personal so again a flexible approach is utilised. We make it possible to ensure that following a late shift that a nurse may have a late start the next day and continually review and amend the rotas to ensure it works for both the business and the individual. Recovery from OOH checks is very important and we have system in place surround intensive overnight care and what recovery time is appropriate.

#### 5.4 How is colleagues' work-life balance supported?

*Give brief details and an example*

Work life balance is supported with flexibility and communication. We do not have a one-size fits all approach. Two full time nurses doing 39 hours per week may have very different rotas to fit around their interests or home life e.g. Nurse A may choose to do 4 longer days with whole day off while Nurse B may do 2 long days and 3 short ones to fit with a hobby/class, child care or just from self care point of view. We also realise that Veterinary isn't a 9-5pm job so offer financial rewards or time in lieu for weekend/anti-social hours. We understand that hospital appointments or personal issues arise and again work with the individual to ensure balance etc.

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

*(maximum 150 words)*

The Head Nurses and Practice Manager work tirelessly to ensure that we can offer this flexible approach to the whole team and in return the team are receptive to helping out with cover, swapping shifts or offering solutions for improving workload.

## 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*

When a client complains all staff involved are asked to record their interactions and provide a summary of the incident within our PMS. An appropriate person undertakes an investigation and a response given to the client. All staff have completed complaint handling training and know who to refer up to. If it has particularly impacted a staff member (e.g aggressive client) they are provided a break and the option of having meeting with relevant manager to discuss. All complaints look at the systems behind cause and not the person. They are also treated as learning exercise so the person involved may be asked to provide follow up training for the team or assist with protocol changes. An Open Door policy in place for all staff.

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

*Give brief details and an example*

In case of abusive or threatening behaviour there are systems for while this might be happening e.g. the consult rooms have hatches to Reception so assistance can be sought, or our internal phones have safety pager feature. Following an incident staff are debriefed by line manager and it in extreme cases may even lead to Management contacting the client to ask them to seek veterinary care elsewhere as we will not tolerate abusive behaviour towards our staff. Staff are helped to determine ways in which they can de-escalate situations and flags on records are made clear in case of future interactions.

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

*Give brief details and an example*

While we try to minimise solo working it is inevitable at times. Lone workers have access to personal safety alarms & are briefed in what to do if unhappy with a situation such as an argument taking place outside the practice in the middle of the night. Recently a SVN felt uneasy about strangers being outside the Practice, called the duty vet who met the Nurse at a local public spot before going together. There is also CCTV which can be reviewed or viewed live from within the Practice & remotely. Staff are encouraged to put their personal safety first. Various senior staff would also be contacted to then be able to assist at the time. The OOH team also use the private Facebook group to check in and make sure their colleague on duty are ok.

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

*(maximum 150 words)*

All staff are treated as individuals and support of work demands really is tailored to the individual. The Management believe in leading by example and make themselves available at any time to support the team from what they know to be high pressure 24/7 vocation. The team appreciate the effort made by the business leaders from "off duty" check ins, grabbing a staff member for a coffee and catch up, regular appraisals, rota or workload reviews and forward proactive approach to wellbeing. While our mission is about working with clients to improve their pets' lives we also want to make work fun and be the Practice of choice for staff.