



# White Cross Vets

## 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*

Health and safety is the foundation to wellbeing in our practice. Each practice is equipped with a full health and safety manual, and each practice has two representatives to ensure the policies and procedures within are understood and adhered to, with a clinic director having overall responsibility for its implementation. Team members are introduced to these processes during induction training, either face-to-face or through our online health and safety portal, which ensures they are aware of our procedures. It is important these procedures are not just read and forgotten. Constant monitoring and recording takes place, such as weekly fire alarms tests, and slip, trips and falls inspections. Annual updates, re-training and reviews of risk assessments are key, to ensure everything is up-to-speed.

## 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*

To promote good health and wellbeing, we start by ensuring all team members take their two ten-minute breaks each day, as well as their full thirty-minute lunch, giving them an opportunity to get fresh air should they want it. If these breaks are not happening, our wellbeing champion will discuss this with the team member if. If the team member chooses to stay indoors, air-conditioning, break rooms, plenty of sunlight through the large practice windows and water fountains ensure comfort. We also look to encourage exercise through special initiatives, such as our £50 contribution toward team member's Fitbits. Team members can then compete on our Fitbit leaderboard, a weekly competition across the group, with prizes each week for different challenges. This has led to group dog walks, gym sessions, and lunchtime strolls. We also run a cycle to work scheme, and our My Benefits portal gives team members access to gym memberships, sports equipment, healthy recipes and yoga classes, meaning team members can enjoy every opportunity to stay fit and healthy.

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

*Give brief details and an example*

We recognise the importance mental health awareness. That's why we've run mental health awareness training for the leadership team, followed by stress and sleep hygiene training for all team members. All team members have had the opportunity to complete mindfulness webinars inside or outside of work time. In our weekly e-mail, we include a "Paws for thought" section, which focusses on promoting handy tips for mental wellbeing, advertising initiatives they might get involved in, and outlining how to recognise when others might be struggling. We share initiatives that have taken place about the practices, such as wearing bright socks on mental health awareness day. We also recognise that projects and hobbies outside of work are crucial for mental wellbeing, so we encourage the teams to get involved with the community, and we tell them why - not just to help out, but for their own mental health. Five paid charity days (volunteering for a charity of their choice) are given each year so team members can do this.

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

*Give brief details and an example*

We have promoted a number of initiatives to manage stress in practice. Each practice has an appointed wellbeing champion, who acts as a go-to figure for all the team. As alluded to previously with their monitoring of breaks, our wellbeing champions are trained and encouraged to look out for and intervene when there are signs of over-working and burn-out - this might include increased conflict in the practice. We have also recently introduced our wellbeing days. These days are provided in addition to annual leave and sickness days, and they are in place for when team members need them. In other words, if they are feeling stressed, overworked, or burnt out, they can take a wellbeing day (they must give a week's notice, and if it is more urgent, it is likely to be classed as sickness absence). The idea here is to flag any problems and hit the reset button. For those in need, our our Simply Health scheme provides a professional counselling advice line or face-to-face counselling sessions, and is advertised around the practices.

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

*Give brief details and an example*

We provide team members with as much support as possible through sickness absence. Regular contact is key. This is between the manager and the team member – ideally by phone every week. Every returning team member will undergo a structured return to work interview with their manager so we can establish how we can support them with any additional requirements they might have, making adjustments accordingly. Examples might include phased returns to work, which we actively encourage to avoid people rushing back before they are well. Adjustments for team members with specific requirements have included stools in consult rooms with for those with musculoskeletal conditions. If required, we may look at a mini-induction for those returning from a long period of absence (e.g. re-training on health and safety protocol).

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

*(maximum 150 words)*

Supporting physical and mental health has been top of the agenda within our group for a number of years, and that's why our systems are thorough. We've been able to establish what does and doesn't work. It starts with the basics, and the implementation of the correct policies and procedures such as generous annual leave allowance and structured breaks. Clarity is key in areas such as not paying overtime and making sure time is taken in lieu instead. The environment is optimised to be pleasant and conducive to good health. Establishing the correct support networks, and encouraging communication about mental health, means people know where to go and are willing to go there. We are then able to add our additional flourishes to help our team to thrive. This includes Fitbit challenges, days off on birthdays, discounts, charity days, bonuses, free treatment for team pets, Easter eggs for children – touches which will either help the team, or let them know that we care.

## 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*

Teams organise regular activities outside of work, often making the most of bonuses to do so. From weekend breakfasts to bowling trips, baby showers to afternoons at the local climbing wall, the teams get up to all sorts in their time out of work beyond your standard meal out. Teams also have the opportunity to bond at our annual Congress. This two-day event brings the whole company together, and includes a prestigious awards dinner and a number of hours of CPD from internal and external speakers. It's a wonderful weekend of team building and celebration.

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

To identify issues, monthly one-to-one catch-ups take place between team members and their managers. The wellbeing champion is also available at all times. An open, honest culture is encouraged in weekly meetings to resolve conflict early. Once identified, managers are trained to deal with conflict through our ILM program. They would discuss the conflict with both team members informally, which usually results in a resolution. Just this week, for example, a team member complained that their colleague was arriving late, adding to others' workloads. During informal discussion, it was established that the vet in question had a legitimate reason, and they stayed later to make up for this. This satisfied the complainant. If the conflict hadn't been resolved, our HR team would guide the manager through our formal process.

### 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*

It is important that team members read and understand our formal policy on bullying and harassment during induction training, so they are aware of what to do if it happens to them, how to report instances they witness, and our expectations of their behaviour. It also encourages them to come forward. Our step by step process would be guided by our HR Manager with the relevant line manager. This would start with an attempt to solve the issue informally, as in one example, where we found the accused team member was not aware their "joking" about another's hairstyle was perceived as bullying, and they stopped immediately. However, where it cannot be solved informally, this matter would be escalated to a formal process. The procedure is available to all, located on our team intranet and in our team handbook.

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

Our team are a family. The tone is set when you walk into practice on your first day; pictures of team member's families and their pets line the walls. Team members are team members, never staff; we are all working together to achieve quality care. A service pin is presented on day one and worn with pride. It is touches such as this which create a family culture, the foundation for strong relationships within the team. Perhaps one of the most powerful ways of ensuring strong working relationships is saying thank you. We equip team members to do this through our own internal currency; the 'Alfie' scheme. Each team member receives five Alfies each month which they can give to colleagues as a means of recognition in addition to saying thank you. Alfies earned can be donated to charity or exchanged for shopping vouchers, each one being worth £1.

## 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*

Team meetings occur at least once per week in every practice. The teams have a whiteboard on which they can add topics for discussion that week, and these might range from rotas, to specific working practices. For anyone who misses these meetings, a minute taker is assigned to circulate the outcome. We find this meeting has been crucial in establishing the most efficient working practices – simple changes, such as starting receptionist shifts fifteen minutes prior to opening time, has made a huge difference in reducing stress for certain teams. These meetings are in addition to the aforementioned regular one-to-ones with managers every month, and we provide a template for discussion here, covering personal roles and duties, relationships, and training opportunities.

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: 24

Nurses: 24

Reception staff: 24

Support staff: 24

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

Each team member is signed up to our weekly electronic team newsletter 'Briefly Connected' and our six-monthly award-winning 'Connected' magazine. These channels ensure our team members keep in touch with what is happening in the organisation - be it birthdays, exciting initiatives within practices, good ideas, or other celebrations such as new team members. The team send in the content each week, so if there is anything they wish to communicate, they can do so - for example, this week, it was details of a recent wedding in Las Vegas! Regular communication also takes place through practice e-mails, Facebook discussion groups (divided by job role, through which team members can discuss ideas as to how things are done around the group), and practice WhatsApp groups.

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*

Managers are trained on the importance of empowerment through our ILM sessions. This means that in each practice, team members are given a say in how work is carried out. In addition, our bi-annual Voice meeting plays a crucial role in encouraging suggestions for change. A different practice hosts the meeting each time, with a representative from each practice attending. They share issues from their practices and together we look for solutions. For example, at one meeting, a practice highlighted that the term 'receptionist' did not do justice to the front of house role. The representatives therefore proposed a new name, which the practices voted upon, and all receptionists were renamed CCCs (Client Care Coordinators). This empowerment is complimented by bi-annual happiness surveys.

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

Regular phone calls are used to communicate with those on extended absence, and as previously mentioned, this would ideally be once a week. However, we would check in with the team member initially to establish their preferred form of communication – for example, recently a team member asked for some space, so we used text one week, and a phone call the next. The important thing is that we are in touch, and we are open to their needs. Where appropriate, we may arrange a visit to their house, or a meet-up in a local café, to show our support and better establish how else we might be able to help them. During maternity leave, we are very keen to use KIT days. We provide those on maternity, paternity or adoption leave with a £500 "New Arrivals" payment as an additional means of support.

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

Being multi-site brings its challenges in terms of keeping team members engaged with company life, but we combat this to ensure strong internal interaction and communication across the group, so that the family stays connected. Communication starts from day one with communication of our open culture and business aims. This is through our Principles One training session, a session all new team members take part in to ensure they understand what we are all about and how we function. Posters of the principles can then be seen across practices, again reinforcing our organisational aims.

This is followed up with the initiatives mentioned previously, namely meetings, discussion groups, and weekly bulletins. The final touch is a company-wide congress, which helps to ensure team members from around the country aren't strangers, opening up a platform for discussion going forward through our many mediums.

## 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: 6 months

Student Veterinary Nurses: 6 months

Vets: 6 months

Nurses: 6 months

Reception staff: 6 months

Support staff: 6 months

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*

Across the group, we have appointed a number of senior vets for the purpose of supporting newer vets. These more experienced team members are a huge support to the clinic director in mentoring the newest graduates. All of our senior vets and clinic directors attend our Coaching and Mentoring sessions on our ILM program, so they are equipped to do this. Likewise, every student nurse will have a nursing mentor, who is often their learning co-ordinator, but not always. For new CCCs, they will initially shadow, then work alongside an experienced CCC, before they are ready to perform the role solo. They also have the additional support of a team member from Central Support who is a Client Care champion!

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

Each vet is given a £1000 CPD fund and 5 paid CPD days. We also support many through clinical certificates by giving funding and time off. Funded CPD at our annual congress is crucial, too, where we bring external speakers in to train the teams. For example, last year, sessions on rabbit anaesthesia were a big hit.

Nurses:  yes  no  not applicable

Our nurses have a CPD allowance of £500 and 3 paid CPD days. In addition, many are funded through certificates. Again, our annual congress provides a substantial amount of clinical CPD for all nurses.

Receptionists:  yes  no  not applicable

Our CCCs are often given training in veterinary dispensing, providing them with useful clinical skills as front-of-house practitioners. In addition, they are able to attend any sessions at our annual congress that they wish, and they often choose to join the clinical sessions.

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

Veterinary surgeons enjoy ample funded opportunities to develop non-clinically. Take for example our recent series of lunchtime sessions based around communication styles, helping them to communicate with both fellow team members and clients. At our Congress, internal and external speakers provide non-clinical sessions on topics such as reducing stress and developing practice culture. Clinic directors and senior vets attend sessions for and work toward a fully funded ILM qualification - a diploma in some cases. This involves monthly coaching with an external provider, as well as quarterly training sessions as a group. Example topics include coaching and mentoring, so the team benefit from the sessions back in the practice.

Vet Nurses:  yes  no  not applicable

As well as the sessions at our congress mentioned previously, we often fund our veterinary nurses through non-clinical CPD. For example, following her appraisal, one nurse undertook a fully funded diploma in health and safety. Head nurses also attend our ILM sessions alongside the clinic directors and senior vets.

Reception staff:  yes  no  not applicable

All client care co-ordinators have had the opportunity to complete NVQs in customer service in the last three years. Additionally, they attend non-clinical sessions at our congress, and we had ten CCCs attend the Onswitch Front of House Congress.

Support staff:  yes  no  not applicable

For support staff, CPD requirements are established through appraisals. There is no set allowance here, the training is based on need, but if a team member is keen to develop, we rarely say no. For example, one team member started their level 3 CIPD certificate in HR. Another attends regular training sessions regarding vetspace, before she then comes back to train the practice teams. Upskilling and passing on learnings is key in helping support practices.

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

*Give brief details and an example*

Our annual congress is used as our opportunity to recognise top performance and achievement. The Awards dinner takes place on the Saturday night, with awards such as Nurse of the Year being voted for by team members. On a more day-to-day level, we use our aforementioned "Alfie" scheme so team members can say thank you and well done to one another. Clinic director and team bonuses are also a crucial part of celebrating success. These monetary rewards - awarded for meeting targets such as wellness plan sales - are often put towards gifts, with one team recently purchasing a smoothie maker for their practice kitchen!

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

We recognise that development and progression is key to both practice success and team member engagement. We use our appraisal system to establish training need, and provide suggested training areas and funding accordingly. Training is not considered a cost, here, but an investment into the skills and quality of care we can provide. That's why we make it easy, and are willing to invest heavily, in training and development.

### 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*

Ensuring workload is manageable is an ongoing process. It starts with a clearly defined job description. In each appraisal, team members review their job descriptions. This ensures they are working within the demands of their own role, and tasks might be re-distributed accordingly to maintain a manageable workload. It also means that recruitment can begin at an earlier stage where appropriate. We rely on our wellbeing champions here, too, to look for signs of burnout and stress, indicators that a workload is too high. When a team member took two of the aforementioned wellbeing days in a month, for example, this was a red flag for the wellbeing champion. We were able to run through their daily workload with them, establish it was too high, and alter things accordingly.

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

*Give brief details and an example*

Our policies are designed to allow time for recovery and rest, helping to improve productivity. For example, team members must take any extra hours worked back in lieu during that month – the next day wherever feasible. Vets must adhere to four-day weeks. We have no out-of-hours, and all team members take the aforementioned regular rest breaks (with two 10-minute breaks plus lunch). If a break is needed for whatever reason, there is no shortage of opportunity to take it. Paid days for funeral attendance and emergencies help to relieve the stresses of life events, as do our wellbeing days. Annual leave cannot be carried over into the next holiday year, ensuring it is taken. This is in addition to our holiday purchase programme, a day off for birthdays, our peternity leave initiative - four days of leave to settle their new pets into their homes – and charity days.

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

*Give brief details and an example*

It is the nature of veterinary practice that opening hours are long, but a work life balance is still possible. Rotas are discussed during team meetings to accommodate requests, with team members alternating between early and later shifts. Consecutive weekends of work are only taken in exceptional circumstances and time is always taken back the following week regardless – small touches such as taking time back on a Friday to extend the weekend are always appreciated. As per legislation, team members can request flexible working, and we listen, allowing team members to blend work and life effectively. One example of this was a new mother returning from maternity leave, who was granted early shifts only. These initiatives are in addition to the aforementioned opportunities for days off.

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

*(maximum 150 words)*

We understand that our team want to provide the best quality care they can give to pets, and to do so, they need to be refreshed and ready to work. It is a communication process, where we encourage them to engage with us through appraisals to ensure the workload is at a sustainable level. We've learnt through feedback what works to help create this manageable workload – so that's the enforced TOIL, the additional days off, the regular rest breaks. It is a fast-paced environment, but we do what we can to ensure team members aren't swept off their feet!

## 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*

That's why team members receive access to online pet bereavement training to ensure they are comfortable in supporting clients at the most difficult times. If a client does complain, we have strict complaints procedure in place, which the team member is introduced to during induction, and can refer to and fall back on as a support. For example, following a recent complaint about a vet's attitude during a consult, the vet followed the procedure by discussing options with the clinic director. The vet then attempted to solve the issue with an informal chat and apology to the client. The client was satisfied after the apology. If they hadn't been, the vet would have informed them that they had to submit the complaint in writing to the clinic director. All correspondence would then take place in writing to ensure full records, protecting the team member.

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

*Give brief details and an example*

We have run company-wide training sessions on dealing with stress, so they can respond in a calm and effective manner if a client acts in an abusive or threatening manner. Our health and safety policies and procedures then guide team members on how they should proceed in the event of abusive or threatening clients. For example positive action is encouraged to de-escalate a situation early on, and a team member did this recently by calling their manager into their consult room as a client's temper flared. The manager, trained in conflict management, then calmed the client, establishing that they would not tolerate aggression, as outlined in our equal opportunities and dignity at work policy. If required, team members are signposted to our Simply Health professional counselling advice line or face-to-face counselling sessions and our wellbeing days.

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

*Give brief details and an example*

Our lone working policy guides team members on protocol for working alone, which helps to support them through any potential hazards here. For example team members leaving to do home visits must follow a checklist of tasks, which include advising fellow team members of key details (such as duration and destination), taking the work mobile, and providing updates should anything change. A designated team member will then contact them should they not arrive back as expected. Team members are not required to work alone in the practice itself, as shifts end at the same time. If this did occur for any reason, each practice has a practice mobile given to one team member each day in case of emergencies, and the lone worker would be able to phone this number.

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

*(maximum 150 words)*

One of the foundations we put in place to help team members deal with work demands comes from the buildings themselves. Air-conditioning, brand new equipment, break rooms, spacious waiting areas, plenty of sunlight, water fountains – our purpose-built practices are equipped to ensure team member, client, and pet comfort. This helps to minimise stress. By then training team members in both stress management and the policies and procedures they need to follow in case of client complaints or aggression, they are well-supported and prepared for any eventualities. Having the structure and the framework in place to follow makes work demands far more manageable.