



## Scott Veterinary Clinic – Highly Commended

### Work Demands & Work Conditions

#### Q. Is training in working with clients provided for team members?

For reception staff they are encouraged to go to CX congress, and we had the on-switch bus come to the practice for the day to help with working with clients. For the nurses they are trained by more senior staff in admits and discharges, answering the phone and are shadowed initially until they are confident to deal with clients by themselves. For the vets we do consult observations regularly for all staff, feedback on this, reflect and repeat the process at least every 6 months. We have found encouraging training really motivates our staff and helps them grow in confidence

#### Q. How are colleagues supported in the event of client complaints?

Over the last year we have developed a clear complaint process with paperwork involved for staff to follow. These are categorised and analysed so that we can hopefully learn from the experience and are part of the discussion process in our practice meetings. Every 6 weeks we close the practice for the day to allow team meetings to occur and then a large meeting involving all departments. This has created an honest open environment where complaints can be seen as a learning experience. An example of this is when a complaint arose over a client not realising there would be a charge for referring her pet which is for the vet's time to write a letter, refer the x-rays and liaise with the referral centre. This was resolved very easily by a director explaining the charges but since it was not the first complaint like this it was discussed at the meeting how we can tackle this in the future. The vets are now taught to include talking about this charge when referring a patient and a leaflet has been produced with all the information including the costings on so this can be given to the clients at a time when they may be very stressed and not understanding or listening to everything we say. We will monitor the response to this and check then number of associated complaints are reducing. Having a clear complaint process has given confidence to our staff in dealing and handling with complaints. This had made it become a learning, positive experience rather than a negative one.

**Q. How are colleagues supported in the event of clients being abusive or threatening?**

We have a clear sign up at all branches saying, "all animals deserve respect and so do our staff". This arose from a request from the staff after having an abusive client at the front desk as felt it might help future problems. Line managers are always on hand to step in initially in these instances and remove the client away from the area, talk calmly with them and let them talk. We also arrange post incident conversations in the hope we can give reassurance and reflection. To support our out of hours staff we always have a director on call for them to phone. Practice policy states that if we are under threat the member of staff ring to ask for help using a false name so it is very clear to the director there is an urgent problem that needs supporting straight away. Having a clear policy has helped staff feel confident at dealing with these difficult situations.

**Q. How are colleagues who may spend time working alone supported?**

Out of hours the vet and nurse work together and we have converted the on-call flat so have 2 bedrooms so they both can stay. Both vet and nurse have a mobile phone provided and there is always a director on back up to help with difficult clients/financial problems/give support if needed. There is a personal alarm provided at the practice and CCTV has been installed both inside and outside the building for extra security. After setting up 2 small branches we ensure no one member of staff spends more than 5 hours working there alone and in winter we offer to

close earlier if there is only 1 member of staff so they feel safe with the darker nights. For mental health support we have discretely placed posters up in the toilets for information on external support networks. The CCTV has really helped staff feel secure and happier with the out of hours work.

**Q. Give one additional example of how work demands are managed to support wellbeing in your practice.**

Both the nurses and vets' rotas have been recently worked on in a consultation process with all our staff. For the nurses we have ensured they have a variety of different jobs and work in different areas to allow them to be removed from more stressful areas. For the vet's rota we made some larger changes. Firstly, on the old rota the vets would work the morning after their night shift and would work the evening surgery before the night shift. We have amended this so they just work the overnight shift now so they can get adequate rests between shifts. At the weekends the vets used to be on call from Saturday morning to Monday morning. This is obviously stressful for them, so we changed the rota so one vet is on call in the day and another one over-night. This has greatly improved their work life balance. Also, we account for every hour they are on call as normal working hours. This has meant they now have a week off after working a week of nights. Again, this has greatly improved their wellbeing. It has meant we had to employ two extra vets for this rota, but we

felt the sacrifice was worth it in the long run as improving the vet's wellbeing has given us happier vets that are more likely to stay with us for the future.

## Workload and scheduling

### Q. Are individuals' workloads monitored and, if necessary, revised?

Individuals have mentors to speak to about things such as workloads that aren't necessary clinical and reviews are held at 4,8 and 12 weeks then every 6 months for all vets and nurses. We have always performed yearly appraisals but introducing these further checks have really helped pick up on any early problems and find solutions. The nurses have recently had an evening meeting to discuss their work load and produced a problem list with solutions. Currently we are looking at this to try and work with them and have a deadline of the new year to have liaised sufficiently for this. Since the recent change of the vet's rota we have hoped this has helped with workloads and are going to review it in 3 months' time.

### Q. Do work schedules allow adequate rest between one working day and the next?

The new vet's rota certainly ensures adequate rest periods and with the imminent changes on the nurse's rota although they have had adequate rest periods previously this will be improved further. We also ensure if the nurses have a college day, they never do a night shift the day before.

### Q. How is colleagues' work-life balance supported?

We hope we are always supportive of a good work-life balance. We are always open to flexible working requests and are fair to all staff members with this. With the new vet's rota, we listened to their requests and have tried to keep them having regular late evenings and half days so they have a regular routine and can plan their lives more effectively. We try to be flexible if people have children's sports days and Christmas plays to attend. We have also offered on many occasions extra compassionate days above and beyond those noted in the practice policy and often will consider unpaid leave or extended holiday periods e.g. for sabbaticals or honeymoons.

**Q. Give one additional example of how workload and work scheduling are managed to support wellbeing in your practice.**

- Rotas are always produced 4 weeks in advance and all staff asked to check and come back to use if there are any problems they foresee. This also allows people time to plan. We produce a general rota for on call a year in advance to help with this too. When the new vets start, we always have a more senior vet in theatre with them until they are confident and will always have a director on call as back up every night to provide extra support and re assurance if needed. We always have had great feedback for our support network from all staff and pride ourselves in this.

## **Relationships at work**

**Q. 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)?**

We have some regular activities every year which include a rounders evening at the local park with take away pizza and drinks in June, we run secret Santa at Xmas where everyone joins in to buy another member of the practice a present. We close the practice for the gift giving for 2 hours on Xmas eve and put on buffet food for staff and have festive music. Also, at Christmas we pay for all staff (with discount for their partners) to attend an annual Xmas dinner with a DJ. At this event we give out the employee of the year trophy which is voted for by all the staff. We give all staff a thank you bottle of champagne or alcohol free fizzy at Christmas and a thank you hard hand written by the directors to make our thanks personal and specific. We have also put on other events over the last year including a bingo night, Harry Potter visit, afternoon tea and afternoon BBQs and a trip to the local outdoor aqua park. We have tried to vary these activities to appeal to all and have now got a dedicated entertainment officer elected!

**Q. What mechanisms are used to identify and address any difficulties or conflict between colleagues?**

We always encourage an open-door policy. We encourage any issues initially to be raised with the head of that department who would gain all the facts and be an intermediary before approaching the directors. Often problems can be resolved this way before they escalate. We have also developed a "have your say" box which is checked weekly and gives people an opportunity to voice their opinions in private in writing for those who may be too nervous to approach the heads of departments. We have also developed more 1:1 consultation with intermediary staff leading these conversations as some people prefer to talk to them rather than heads of departments. This has given a very open relationship between all staff which has been a positive.

**Q. Does the practice have a clear policy relating to harassment and bullying at work, including processes for managing allegations of harassment or bullying?**

The practice has a clear bullying and harassment policy which is section 4.19 of the practice manual which can be accessed by all computers in the building. It ensures all staff are treated and treat others with dignity, respect and free from harassment and bullying. It covers in and out of the work place and all workers. It refers to the Equality Act 2010 and the protection from harassment Act 1997. It gives examples of harassment and bullying and talks about informal steps, raising formal complaints, how formal investigations will be held and the action and appeal process. It also talks about protection for those making complaints. All our staff read and sign to say they have read this to ensure importance is allocated to this.

**Q. Give an additional example of how positive relationships at work are supported in your practice.**

We have created a positivity board in the staffroom where the different departments are colour coded with different cards and people acknowledge small nice things other members of staff have done and pin it up on the board. We hope it helps build more positivity into the day. It has been a roaring success already. We also offer free tea and coffee (and biscuits on a Friday!) and we try to minimise any hierarchy, so we all use the same room for breaks and share the same offices. Positive relationships at work are paramount to us. One of our recent new graduate vets said she knew at the interview it would be a great place to work as one of the vets actually skipped into the prep room! I love this about the people we work with.

## Career development

### Q. Is supervision provided for less-experienced colleagues?

For the nurses less experienced colleagues are always shadowed until they are confident and competent. They have a comprehensive induction booklet and a training list for competency which is completed and checked before going solo. For the vets any less experienced vets are paired up with a more senior vet who does their 1:1 interviews at 4,8 and 12 weeks after joining then at 3 and 6 months which is then passed onto the directors. These are usually their PDP mentor too. Initially the new vets are shadowed when on call and when operating. There is a director on call as back up every night and for the exotic side of the practice we have an experience exotic vet on back up too to answer any queries and/or come in to help if needed. The vets also have an induction booklet in electronic format specifically for our practice. We have reviewed and developed the induction booklets over time by listening to our vets and responding appropriately.

### Q. Does the practice support (e.g. fund and/or give time for) relevant training (e.g. clinical and/or professional/non-clinical skills) for colleagues in the following groups?

We support the vets for relevant training. Each vet has 5 days cpd and a cpd allowance of up to £1500 a year. In addition to this further funding is often provided if vets are doing a certificate and we increase their cpd days to 7 days a year. For Advanced Practitioner vets we provide 7 days cpd to account for and support the fact they need extra cpd to maintain their status and pay for their yearly fee. We have also recently started running a journal club led by one of the senior vets which is every 6 weeks where over lunch a paper is discussed and analysed. We provide pizza for this to encourage attendance and to give thanks.

The nurse has £300 and 3 days cpd per year and again if they are keen to do their diploma, we will fund all of this and give extra cpd time.

The reception does not have a set amount of cpd, but we have encouraged all of them to go to the pet crematorium we use and spend a day understanding and learning there. We do also encourage any further qualifications they may want to pursue e.g. SQP or QVPR and fund this.

With all our staff we send a letter of congratulations at completion of any further qualifications of certificates and normally with an accompanying pay rise again to say thanks for all their efforts. We feel it is really important to support and encourage further training to engage our staff fully.

### **Q. How are good performance and colleagues' achievements recognised by the practice?**

We have a few ways of recognising good performance or achievements in the practice. We have our assessment for practice standards on 18th October and hope to gain hospital status for the first time. This in itself would be a great achievement and having this status I am sure will make all the staff and clients proud of themselves. We have a nurse of the month selected by the head nurse for their commitment/performance and have a photo taken which is displayed on the main notice board with a trophy. We also have an employee of the year which is voted for by all staff and announced at the Xmas dinner with a large trophy and a prize (last year the prize was a photoshoot). We award staff for long service with red letter days at 10,20- and 25-years' service and present it to them in the practice meetings. Any new qualifications are also recognised on our Facebook page and many clients often comment on this. We have specific performance related reviews yearly which are associated with pay increments.

### **Q. Give one additional example of how colleagues' professional and career development is supported in your practice.**

For the last few years our deputy head nurse has set up OSCE evenings in her own time to provide mock exams and support for the nurses that are due to sit their OSCE's. We support this by providing food, drink and time in lieu which is always well received.

## **Communication at work**

### **Q. Do colleagues meet regularly – i.e. daily or weekly – to discuss day-to-day work matters?**

The vets and nurses have rounds every day at 4.30pm to discuss inpatients and any other work-related matters. There is a director meeting every Monday afternoon followed by a head of department meeting every Tuesday morning to disseminate any relevant information to the rest of the staff. One of the directors attends the head of department meeting too to answer any queries. We have a practice meeting every 6 weeks which includes discussing policy changes/complaints/training. We have regular appraisals, at least yearly for all members of staff which include 360-degree reviews. Within the day the 3 operating vets discuss the order of work first thing and at 11am a senior vet checks in with them to see how things are going.

**Q. Apart from meetings, what other communication channels for colleagues are used in the practice?**

We have a suggestion box in the main staff room for people to put in anonymous suggestions and the directors check this weekly and discuss as appropriate and feed back to all staff. The nurses have a "have your say" box in the nurse's office, again for people who are less likely to communicate verbally to make suggestions. This can be about anything from asking for a new kettle to looking at rota changes. We encourage solutions to come with suggestions too. We have a call back system where all staff have their own log in to communicate easily within the practice. We have a positivity board for all staff to communicate to each other positive experiences. We have always encouraged an open-door policy and the practice manager's door is always open. One of our practice values is open, honest communication and we try our best to fulfil this.

**Q. Are all members of the practice team able to have a say in how work is carried out?**

All members are actively encouraged to speak up and have their say. All staff attend the practice meeting and we split the meeting up into small groups so hopefully people are happy to communicate openly. Again, we encourage an open-door policy and the 1:1 reviews with heads of departments or other staff should mean we listen to everyone and always feedback with reasonings. We have placed posters up around the practice with our vision, so staff are really bought into our values.

**Q. Give one additional example of how effective communication is supported in your practice.**

When we made a significant change to the vet's rota, we provided a consultancy period which we felt was essential to ensure everyone understood why the changes were happening and that everyone had a say in this. We listened to what the vets wanted and formulated several rotas. We then gave it to them to discuss and had a further meeting answering queries and finally produced 2 rotas which they could choose from taking different people's views into account. Providing a consultancy period ensured everyone's views were heard. We did also consult other members of staff and involved all the teams as ultimately, we understood that any change would affect everyone. This ensured the change process was clear, focused and people understood the reasons for the change and therefore were more accepting of them. This was a newer way for us to tackle a change rather than just dictating it and it made a big difference to us as was taken in a much more positive manner. In the future we definitely feel consultancy processes should be involved in any changes we do.

## Promoting physical and psychological health at work

### Q. Does the practice take a proactive approach to managing health and safety hazards at work?

We have an up to date health and safety policy which is reviewed regularly, and all staff have to read this and review it regularly. At our 6 weekly practice meetings we ask any staff for health and safety concerns and encourage any problems in the interim not to wait but to discuss with Francesca, one of the directors who is our health and safety officer.

### Q. Are healthy eating, exercise and similar health initiatives for colleagues promoted?

We have a rounders match once a year and encourage as many as possible to attend. We provide gym membership for all staff after their 6-month probation period to a gym of their choice. We have created an area in the prep room for people to store water bottles to encourage drinking.

### Q. How is awareness of mental health promoted by the practice?

One of the directors attended a mental health course and has a badge so people know they can approach her as an initial point of contact. We are looking into another member of staff being trained to be a mental health first aider to be able to listen, reassure and respond. Our head receptionist is keen to do this so hopefully she can go on the course in the near future. We also encourage awareness of mental health in the hope that staff will approach the directors if they have any concerns. We also have posters up on all the toilet doors with external help lines available.

### Q. What stress management initiatives are promoted by the practice?

One of the directors used a questionnaire provided by the VDS to all staff re stress management using HSE guidelines. This was analysed by the VDS in conjunction with the director involved. She then put this into a stress policy using the results from all staff (had 80% uptake of answering questionnaire). This was an 8 paged document specifically for our practice and has been added to the practice policy. This was done for the first time in April 2018 and will be reviewed and repeated yearly. Just the actual process of filling in the questionnaire created positive communication and relationships around the practice and hopefully the outcome will help everyone.

**Q. Are colleagues supported during extended sickness absence and on return to work?**

If any staff member has an extended period of absence regular communication is important so that they understand our concerns and that we care about their wellbeing. One of the directors is allocated this task and is selected on a personal basis. On their return to work they always have an impartial interview with the HR team to reflect on their absence and see if there are any further actions needed to help. An example of this is when one of our nurses that works at a branch had an extended period off due to mental health issues. We kept in regular contact with her and took helpful advice from her GP. When she returned, we did a very gradual return to work and placed her at the main branch initially until her confidence improved. When she felt she could go to the branch we had another nurse work there to support her again until she was finally confident to work alone in the branch. This did take a longer period than expected but it was worth it not to rush things and for the nurse to feel our full support. I know she is very grateful for this opportunity and it became a very positive experience for her. She improved relationships with other members of staff at the main practice as she got to know them better. Since then we have realised it is beneficial for the branch nurses to spend some time at the main practice, so they feel more part of the team.

**Q. Give one additional example of how physical health and psychological wellbeing are supported in your practice.**

An additional example of supporting wellbeing is ensuring all staff get sufficient breaks. To ensure this happens we have split some of the vets and nurses' lunches which has helped whilst still allowing them to socialise together at lunches. We like to feel at the practice we are a family in the way we support each other. Over the years we have found people feel like this and stay for many years. When people have children, they always bring them into the practice, and we all feel proud to be part of our lovely team. We have created a photo album for events, marriages and births for the members of the practice and it is always lovely to look through. We have many values at the practice but at the heart of them is happiness and wellbeing for all our staff and we really feel we achieve this each and every day.