

Experts address burnout and exit from the veterinary profession

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Employers and employees must work together to tackle issues of confidence and motivation, as a new report from the British Veterinary Association (BVA) reveals day-to-day experiences in the workplace are the biggest drivers for burnout and exit from the veterinary profession.

Researchers at the University of Exeter have been working with BVA as part of the Vet Futures project to explore confidence and motivation levels within the profession. The study, designed by Professor Michelle Ryan and Dr. Chris Begeny, shows that day-to-day workplace experiences, including feeling valued and admired by colleagues, feeling that one has a sense of fitting in with those who have been successful before, and feeling that one has [role models](#) available, have the strongest impact on vets' motivations to stay in the profession or leave.

Without these motivators respondents to the survey revealed they are less likely to feel satisfied in their roles and more likely to suffer burn-out and consider leaving the profession. While the research confirms that long working hours have an impact on job satisfaction it suggests that vets' feelings about their working hours were more relevant than the number of hours they work. Vets who feel they belong and have an expectation they will succeed in their careers were more likely to feel they have a good work:life balance even if their hours are long.

Dr. Begeny said: "Our study with BVA clearly demonstrates that vets' motivation, which encompasses confidence, career potential, and ambition, is very much affected by their day-to-day experiences in the profession. Taken together, these results suggest that if the profession as a whole, and employers more specifically, can implement practices that facilitate feeling valued, fitting in, and the availability of role models, this is likely to have multiple benefits in terms of cultivating a cohort of vets who are strongly motivated in their careers, who are satisfied with their jobs, and who are keen to stay within the profession."

The study, which included a survey of 1,250 members of the BVA Voice of the Veterinary Profession survey panel, found that 37 percent of respondents were actively thinking about leaving the profession. But the report goes beyond describing the current situation in the profession and outlines some simple steps employers and employees can take improve the experiences of vets and boost the retention of skilled and motivated staff. These include:

- emboldening vets' confidence and career ambitions by making efforts to seek out advice from a broad range of employees, facilitating opportunities for colleagues to seek out ideas and advice from one another, and ensuring that such opportunities are as evenly distributed as possible.
- addressing issues of fitting in by making available accessible and attainable role models, communicating that all sorts of people have been successful in the veterinary profession and ensuring that there are clear routes to success.
- supporting reduced work hours, and confronting beliefs that an employee's value rests on their ability to work long hours.

British Veterinary Association President Simon Doherty said:

"There has been a lot of conjecture in recent years about why many vets report feeling stressed and unsatisfied in their roles and what is prompting them to leave the profession. This report goes beyond describing the problem, really explores the motivation and experiences of vets on the ground and sets out some possible solutions.

"This is not about employer needs versus those of the employee, we hear similar concerns from both sides of the debate and I believe there is a consensus that things need to change. We cannot look at issues with retention and recruitment without first addressing problems with low confidence, wellbeing and [job satisfaction](#).

"These findings clearly show that day-to-day workplace experiences have the greatest impact on [vets](#)' satisfaction with their work and improving these will have a long-term positive impact for employer and employees alike. We all agree we want to fix the 'leaky bucket' and that means it is time to change the workplace culture. We all have a role to play in engaging with these discussions and with the suggestions set out in this research."

The study revealed that women in the profession were more likely than their male peers to struggle with the lack of role models and less likely to experience the feeling of 'fitting in' and of being valued and admired by peers. However, both men and women experienced higher motivation when these factors were addressed. A follow-up study with employers, investigating the existence of gender discrimination in the profession, was carried out in Spring 2018 and the results will be launched at BVA Congress at the London Vet Show.

Provided by University of Exeter

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