

P-05-895 Rosa's Legacy: Introduce a scheme to help people access veterinary care for their companion animals, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 24.08.21

To the Chair and Members of the Petitions Committee of Senedd Cymru.

P-05-895 Rosa's Legacy: Introduce a scheme to help people access veterinary care for their companion animals.

Firstly may I thank the Chair and Members for having this petition as an agenda item and for asking me to contribute.

The Ministers Response.

I am grateful for Lesley Griffiths MS response of March this year. I can fully understand why the Welsh Government's priority at that time was dominated by Covid. As I am sure Lesley and yourselves now appreciate more than most how Covid has affected every level of our lives here in Cymru not least people's financial situations. You would also agree I think we are not in a position either to fully evaluate the situation - only the years ahead will do this.

As the minister herself states "pressures on veterinary services have been immense ". However I am concerned that the other side of the consulting table so to speak hasn't been looked at - us " ordinary " companion animal owners who share our homes and hearts with these sentient beings.

I am puzzled as to why the Minister hasn't mentioned CAWGW (Companion Animal Welfare Group Wales) as they kindly have contributed to this issue during the previous Senedd term . Their contribution showed that they had a true understanding of the situation here in Cymru.

RCVS (Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons) Response.

I am grateful to Dr Mandisa Greene for her response which clearly showed the problematic situation in regards to the Royal College being the regulator of it's own profession a situation that has spanned many decades.

As Dr Greene clearly states the RCVS are governed by legislation (The Veterinary Surgeons Act) that is five decades old . In very simplistic terms this greatly limits the way in which they act. Last year after many years of criticism from the UK Government's EFRA Committee (among others) the Royal College conducted a consultation on Legislation Reform (LRC). Out of an estimated nine million Dog owners and ten million Cat owners in the UK 58 took part in this exercise. Only 1,330 individual veterinary surgeons chose to take part in this exercise. **1**

In my last submission I made the Chair and Members aware of the response from the British Veterinary Union (BVU) to the RCVS LRC . As the said document was not in the public domain at that time I requested that the document was not included in the public bundle .

I quote from the document:

Introduction

There is a strong distrust in the ability of the RCVS to perform its duty as a regulator, and reach fair conclusions through its disciplinary committee. This is highlighted in a recent survey (previously shared with the RCVS legal team) where 85% of surveyed veterinary employees reported knowledge of unethical or illegal activity in their practice, and only 2% reported it to the RCVS.

BVU

members perceive that innocent vets, nurses and paraprofessionals will be placed under undue stress and have their livelihood impacted by some of the proposed changes. This perception is the result of poor performance by the RCVS in managing complaints and disciplinary proceedings over many years. Specific issues highlighted by BVU members are the exorbitantly long times to complete cases, disorganised hearings and investigations (e.g. key documents going missing) and no

powers to investigate complaints properly. BVU members have also noted being present at hearings where hearsay was treated as evidence. In addition, the RCVS has failed to act against some unethical veterinarians, leading to the view that it functions as an 'Old-Boys' club 2.

It's my understanding that after their recent LRC the RCVS have decided not to change a vital element of their disciplinary process. The RCVS will still work to the criminal standard " beyond reasonable doubt " and not the civil standard unlike numerous other similar professions.

In my Rosa's case for example tests were conducted on her without my knowledge or consent. Her historic clinical notes were altered with the names of the veterinary surgeons who treated her removed . Her clinical notes clearly showed that a veterinary surgeon experienced difficulty during a routine ex- ray procedure (performed under general anaesthesia). Which I knew nothing about until I requested the notes from the veterinary practice I moved her too . If I had known about this together with the " false positive " element of a blood test (it is standard practice to do a second test examined in a external laboratory). I wouldn't have took the heartbreaking decision to euthanise My beloved Rosa. I think you can imagine the effect this all had on me and still does. Yet the RCVS admitted all the above was out of their remit .

The Code of Conduct of a Veterinary Surgeon is underpinned by five principles of practice including Independence and impartiality. 3

I was deeply saddened but not surprised by Dr Greene's statement that the Royal College cannot act in regards to the se

I have laid evidence before many Members particularly my own Senedd Cymru Members and those who are Shadow Ministers with this portfolio that show clinical decisions by many veterinary practitioners are influenced by the policy's of the corporate companies they work for.

The incident of a Dog owner's simple request for her Dog to be referred to a specialist referral practice not owned by the corporate group who also owned the GP the Dog was being treated at . Resulted in a significant delay and the Dogs death. How can that sit within the third principle to practice above ? 4

Corporate equity owned veterinary practices.

Since my last submission to you this has situation has only got worse. With more than half of all first opinion veterinary practices in the UK being owned by corporate veterinary companies. Here on Ynys Mon we have no fully independently run veterinary practice.

However the corporate groups are now extending their attention to referral practice's and animal hospitals.

Independent Vetcare Evidensia have now announced plans for such a facility in Birmingham. 5

Professor Noel Fitzpatrick MRCVS has stated that Fitzpatrick Referrals is the last remaining multi-disciplinary specialist referral centre of their size that remains independent in the UK. 6

Just how can this situation be seen as being a level playing field for either us who share our lives with these sentient beings, the animals themselves or for that matter those who operate independently run veterinary practices?

It is getting to the stage where veterinary professionals who do not wish to work to the corporate's moral and ethical rule book have only one other alternative - leave the profession they love so much . To quote a RVN who has left after 30 years at the coal face " Linda I wear my badge proudly that I have never worked for a corporate".

Conculsion.

Animal welfare is a matter which is largely devolved to our Senedd Cymru and Welsh Government. However the appointment of an independent external ombudsman for the veterinary profession is not a devolved issue. DEFRA have recently stated that they see no need or reason for one to be appointed as the RCVS are doing just fine.

I am proud to say that I have more faith in My Senedd and Government. Who clearly have more understanding of issues together with the will and determination to lead the way. Such a scheme would be ground breaking, but is in line with so many peoples thinking which is now coming to the forefront within the media, the veterinary profession and rescue sector.

The fact that Independent Vetcare Evidensia one of the biggest corporate venture capitalist veterinary companies have decided to start their own fund which allows a veterinary surgeon to help to the sum of £500 (for an animals treatment at their practice alone) is testament to IVC realising there is a problem 7.

As I have said in previous submissions I know many will see companion animals as a luxury , indeed sadly that is an argument I have heard many veterinary surgeons express publicly in recent months. I use Sandra's words with her permission :

Some people like my self have lost everything
in life my son was murdered husband left no parents left brother
and sister dead totally on own in life my dog is the only company I have when you see a
old man or woman with a little dog it's probably the only company they have not a
luxury the dog most likely the only thing
that person lives for don't be so selfish saying should not have a
dog lonely pensioners need thire dog post may seem a bit strong but it annoys
me when folk come out with that statement they don't know wot loneliness is that's
plain to see.

If I can assist Members further I will of course do so .

Cofion Linda Joyce-Jones.

Ynys Mon Constituency Cymru.

25/8/21.

1: <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/publications/legislative-review-consultation-report-2021/>

2: full document sent to clarking team .

3: <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/advice-and-guidance/code-of-professional-conduct-for-veterinary-surgeons/#principles>

4: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9642305/Calls-inquiry-equity-vultures-snap-vets-amid-rising-bills-welfare-fears.html>

5: <https://www.business-live.co.uk/commercial-property/plans-revealed-new-ivc-evidensia-21331068>

6: Professor Noel Fitzpatrick MRCVS Being the Supervet.

7: <https://ivcevidensia.co.uk/News/IVC-Evidensia-Care-Fund-hits-milestone>