

Professional Wellness Group

Terms of Reference

Background

The personal & professional wellness of veterinarians & veterinary staff are receiving increased attention in veterinary publications & conferences (FAVA, 2014; AVMA, 2017), social media and the non-veterinary press. Recent suicides of high-profile, socially-harassed or victimised veterinarians have caused consternation within the profession. There is an increased recognition that stress & compassion fatigue coupled with a demanding workplace environment are adversely affecting the mental well-being and physical health of veterinarians.

Several studies have estimated the incidence of suicide in the veterinary profession in countries such as USA, UK, Australia & Norway to be double that of the other healthcare professionals, and four times that of the general population (Stoewen, 2016; Bartram & Baldwin, 2008). A number of influencing factors have been postulated as contributing to this increased risk: personality type, undergraduate training, professional isolation, work-related stressors, attitudes to death and euthanasia, access to and technical knowledge of lethal means, psychiatric conditions, stigma around mental illness and suicide contagion (Bartram & Baldwin, 2008, 2010).

A heavy workload, insufficient rest and prolonged, intense contact with animals and their owners can result in occupational stresses and burnout. Veterinarians who neglect their physical, emotional and psychological needs can find themselves suffering from “compassion fatigue”, and it has been estimated that between 15-67% of veterinarians are at high risk of burnout (Brannick et al, 2015).

However, research on professional wellness in the veterinary & healthcare professions almost exclusively comes from the western world. And despite widespread reference, strong scientific support for constructs such as “compassion fatigue” is lacking (Sinclair et al, 2017). Further, anecdotally & from brief literature reviews, veterinary professional wellness appears not to be a significant issue in regions such as Asia. Which raises the question – if this is true, why is it so?

WSAVA has as its mission the advancement of the health and welfare of companion animals worldwide. It achieves this mission through an educated, committed and collaborative global community of veterinary peers. It is imperative that the health, welfare & wellness of the veterinary team is maintained & advanced to ensure the health, welfare & wellness of companion animals under this global veterinary community’s care.

Goal

To improve the health and well-being of veterinarians, para-veterinarians & all members of the veterinary team.

The **Professional Wellness Group** (PWG) will pursue a scientifically rigorous, evidence-based approach, envisaged as a three-year project.

Initial three-year plan

First Year (2017 - Congress 2018):

- Extensive literature review, inventory available (online) toolkits & courses regarding professional wellness of the veterinary team.
- Collation & assessment of currently available information & resources; dissemination of appropriate tools / information online through the WSAVA annual congress & WSAVA's online presence (website, e-bulletin, social media etc.).
- Review available university & association driven student & graduate mentoring programs, their effectiveness & whether these have the potential to be utilised globally. The possibility of a WSAVA pilot working in conjunction with an existing established program.

Second Year (2018 - Congress 2019):

- Survey WSAVA members re: wellness in the profession, establishing scope of problem in various geographic regions. If professional wellness is not an issue, look to understand if is this due to under-reporting, a different veterinary dynamic &/or socio-economic or cultural factors.
- Identify & collate further wellness tools for the veterinary teams & identify shortfalls.
- Assess WSAVA mentoring pilot – training of mentors etc

Third Year (2019 - Congress 2020):

- Using feedback from above to develop various resources to support member associations & their veterinary needs.

Group Structure

The Professional Wellness Group will need expertise & input from a variety of disciplines, particularly in the veterinary & psychology fields. Regional representation is considered vital to ensure inclusiveness, as well as awareness & appreciation of cultural variations & sensitivities that may impact on the group's work.

Committee Membership (see Annex 1)

The composition of the Committee shall consist of:

Core members:

- Chairperson
- WSAVA Board member liaison
- Veterinary membership
- Non-veterinary membership (psychologist/psychiatrist)
- IVAS / veterinary student representative
- Mentoring program representative

Core members are to be appointed for one three (3) year term, with the possibility of a single renewal. Additional ad hoc members can be called upon in specific areas of expertise as & when required.

The Group shall elect the chairperson, this position requiring endorsement from WSAVA's Leadership & Nomination Committee & ratification by the WSAVA Executive Board.

Extent of Authority

The Professional Wellness group is authorised to:

- Design Professional Wellness guidelines, toolkits and provide platforms for disseminating information of relevance to small animal practitioners;
- Provide guidance and assist veterinarians in promoting Professional Wellness in their practice.

Aims of the Committee

- Design guidelines and toolkits for veterinary practitioners to improve professional wellness;
- Review state-of-the art thinking and provide a WSAVA perspective that recognises regional, economic and cultural needs.

Other rights and obligations of the Professional Wellness group

The group shall report on its activities and recommendations or suggestions to the WSAVA Executive Board by way of minutes and additional written and oral reports and then as determined to the General Assembly.

Provide an annual budget for consideration by the WSAVA Treasurer during the compilation of the WSAVA annual budget.

The group will seek to make decisions based on consensus in the first instance, followed by a majority vote consisting of agreement by $\frac{3}{4}$ of the group membership.

Arrangements for meetings

The group shall meet a minimum of quarterly by teleconference. At least one face-to-face group meeting should be held each year; the group could meet at the WSAVA annual World Congress or elsewhere as deemed most appropriate.

Minutes of the meeting shall be recorded and agreed upon by the committee prior to presentation to the WSAVA Executive Board.

Minutes of the final decisions reached after presentation to the Executive Board shall be presented as a written report to the General Assembly annually.

Date of adoption of Terms of Reference by the Professional Wellness Group:

References

Bartram, D. J., & Baldwin, D. S. (2008). Veterinary surgeons and suicide: influences, opportunities and research directions. *The Veterinary Record*, 162(2), 36.

Brannick, E. M., DeWilde, C. A., Frey, E., Gluckman, T. L., Keen, J. L., Larsen, M.R., Mont, S.L., Rosenbaum, M.D., Stafford, J.R. & Helke, K. L. (2015). Taking stock and making strides toward wellness in the veterinary workplace. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, 247(7), 739-742.

Huggard, P., & Huggard, J. (2008). WHEN THE CARING GETS TOUGH Compassion Fatigue and Veterinary Care.

Sinclair, S., Raffin-Bouchal, S., Venturato, L., Mijovic-Kondejewski, J., & Smith-MacDonald, L. (2017). Compassion fatigue: A meta-narrative review of the healthcare literature. *International journal of nursing studies*, 69, 9-24.

Stoewen, D. L. (2015). Suicide in veterinary medicine: Let's talk about it. *The Canadian Veterinary Journal*, 56(1), 89–92.

ANNEX 1

Potential group members

Nienke Endenburg	www.uu.nl/medewerkers/NEndenburg
Shane Ryan	sg.linkedin.com/in/shaneryan
Michael Paton	www.linkedin.com/in/michael-paton-93345846
Brian McErlean	www.linkedin.com/in/brian-mc-erlean-62a56175
Martin Soberano	www.linkedin.com/in/martin-soberano-a54aa511
Janet Donlin	www.linkedin.com/in/janet-donlin-42522817
Tony Fernando	www.linkedin.com/in/dr-tony-fernando-038a33a1
Julie Stafford	www.linkedin.com/in/julie-stafford-255025b1/
Peter Jones	BVA past president

ANNEX 2

Budget item	USD
Initial group face-to-face meeting	10,000
Developing wellness survey and collecting data	5,000
Resource development	8,000
WSAVA website wellness tools	5,000
Total	US\$28,000