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Your Responsibility for Health and Safety at Work

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Your employer has a legal responsibility for your health and welfare at work. There is a lot of legislation to manage the risks you potentially face at work.

Your employer cannot do this in isolation and needs the cooperation from all employees. Health and safety is one area that crosses all boundaries, it doesn't matter how senior you are, what you are paid, whether you work full time or are a volunteer, everyone has a responsibility for health and safety at work.

You are probably very familiar with health and safety at work, you should be familiar with COSHH, risk assessments and safe working protocols. You may have a health and safety representative and you may have received some training.

Health and safety is a huge subject. In the past, it was mostly concerned with physical hazards, and these are still vitally important, but there is an increased focus on our mental wellbeing at work as well.

25% of fatal injuries at work are caused by falling from height and 20% are caused by being struck by a moving vehicle. 40% of non fatal accidents are caused by manual handling, lifting, carrying, slips, trips and falls. (H.S.E.)

Interestingly, various studies have shown that in Small Animal Practice a high number of practitioners have reported chronic work related muscular problems.

An employer has a duty to control the risks in the workplace, identifying what could cause harm and taking steps to either remove or minimise the risks. This is the risk assessment process and employees have a vital role here and should contribute to this in partnership with the employer.

In a veterinary practice, some of the risks may include:

Animal bites, needle stick injuries, slips, trips and falls, lifting, exposure to hazardous substances and x rays, infection control, display screen working, potential violence and lone working, allergens, shift work and heavy work load.

So, what about the employee's responsibilities?

1. Employees should take care of their own, and other people's health and safety who may be affected by what you do (or do not do).
2. Employees should co-operate with others about health and safety and not interfere with, or misuse, anything provided for your health, safety or welfare.
3. Employees should follow any training they have been given, follow all instructions to work safely and use any PPE that they have been provided with.

There are other ways that employees can contribute to health and safety in the workplace. (There are lower rates of accidents in workplaces where employees play an active part in health and safety)

1. Helping to establish a culture of awareness of health and safety, some examples of how this can be done are:

Always having health and safety as an agenda item at team meetings.

Asking about any health and safety concerns when appraisals are conducted.

Engaging with any training or health and safety ideas or initiatives.

2. Raising any concerns promptly. This can include any 'near misses' when an accident could have happened.

3. Ensure that any instructions/posters/notices are up to date and displayed.

Keep the lines of communication open on this subject and encourage everyone to participate.

For further support with this or any other HR issue, BVNA members can call the BVNA Advisory Service Helpline on 01822 870270 or email nickyackerley@hrsupportconsultancy.co.uk.

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