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Jill has always had an interest in animal welfare, and was delighted to become BVNA representative for the Animal Welfare Foundation. Jill is a veterinary nurse and runs ONCORE Online Learning – who provide online, interactive CPD to veterinary nurses, including an Animal Welfare and Ethics module.

Animal Welfare Foundation Discussion Forum 2015

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ABSTRACT: The author recounts a day spent at the Animal Welfare Foundation (AWF) Discussion Forum; an annual event held in Central London. Two free places are offered to veterinary nurses every year in a competition run by BVNA and AWF.

It was with pleasure that I attended the Animal Welfare Foundation (AWF) Discussion Forum on 8 June, for the third consecutive time. Held in the building that serves as the headquarters for the Institution of Civil Engineers, 1 Great George Street, the event is a day jam-packed with thought-provoking and inspiring presentations and discussion of a diverse range of current topics relating to animal welfare.



Nurses and animal welfare

My relationship with AWF started when I first attended the event three years ago, and was struck by the lack of veterinary nurse presence. Thus began a dialogue with the then development manager for AWF, Helen Beioley, as to how we could encourage veterinary nurses to have more involvement with AWF. I became BVNA AWF representative and, for the past two years, have co-ordinated the competition that is a collaboration between AWF and BVNA, for two veterinary nurses to win a place at the event. The purpose of this competition is to help raise awareness of the work that AWF do, to show how nurses may be able to make more of a contribution and to promote the Discussion Forum event.

Entrants were requested to answer a few brief questions about AWF, and then to respond to a short-answer question. This year's question was: 'Tell us why you think

VNs have such an important role to play in improving animal welfare in practice. What can we do to make a difference?' We were impressed with many of the responses, and the sentiments offered clearly demonstrated how pertinent the VN role in promoting animal welfare is perceived by veterinary nurses.

Many nurses highlighted that we are 'patient advocates' and are at the 'front line' in talking to clients about their pet's welfare. It was thought that many clients are likely to feel more comfortable talking to and opening up to nurses as we may be seen as more approachable, and have more time to spend with clients. The other key aspects identified to be linked with welfare were: trust, preventative healthcare, communication and interaction with clients and working alongside other organisations, such as charities and welfare groups.

Winners

This year's two winners were Chloe White, RVN, who is a dietary consultant with Hill's Pet Nutrition and is also studying towards a foundation degree in Canine Behaviour and Training with Bishop Burton College, and Pippa Steans (who was, unfortunately, unable to attend the day). It was lovely to meet and chat with Chloe, who has a clear enthusiasm for animal welfare. Chloe commented that 'the conference was not only educational and enlightening, but also fascinating! Never before have I been able to sit through a whole day's worth of lectures and feel engaged until the very end. Definitely planning to go next year.'

One of last year's winners, Sophie Beckwith, went on to become RVN

representative for AWF, and Sophie, myself and Georgina Allen (AWF Development Officer) recently put together a new leaflet to add to AWF's collection. The leaflet is entitled *Feeding and Exercise*, and offers straightforward owner advice on how to maintain the correct weight of their pet. I was delighted that a simple competition run between BVNA and AWF has facilitated a new collaboration, and production of a piece of literature, authored by VNs, that we hope will help many. The leaflet can be found here: <http://www.bva-awf.org.uk/pet-care-advice>, where there is a variety of other really useful leaflets. These are available as downloads or for ordering from AWF, and includes, among others, the AWF/RSPCA *Puppy Contract*. These make great resources for your practice and waiting room collection, so do take a look.



The forum

The format of the forum is a series of short presentations followed by questions and discussion from the floor, and this works very effectively in airing the many questions, comments and differences of opinions. The day followed a series of themes:

- Antimicrobial resistance, the real world view
- The science of slaughter
- Bursting at the seams: companion animal population management
- A treatment too far? An ethical dilemma session

Each theme session included 1–3 talks, and the ethical dilemma section (which was about the ethics of offering a new procedure – such as providing heart valve replacement) was a great way to end the day. Every topic contained subject matter that is of relevance to all of us in practice, or with an interest in the animal welfare debate. Whilst some areas may at first glance have appeared a little outside our remit, all were of great interest and use in opening our eyes and minds to topics we may not have considered previously. As Tiffany Hemming, Chairman of the board of trustees for AWF said: 'The main thing that this discussion forum does is it provides an opportunity for vet professionals and other interested people in the animal welfare world to talk about and consider welfare challenges that they may not have the opportunity to do in their normal everyday life'.

A session that particularly appealed to me, as a veterinary nurse, addressed animal

population, and some of the information presented was quite shocking – for example the talk concerning the illegal import of puppies. The talk about the feline population problem was given by Maggie Roberts, the director of clinical services at Cats Protection, and offered some really interesting (and rather surprising) figures on cat population. She discussed cat owners' perceptions on various issues, such as the right age to neuter, what age cats could breed from, whether cats should have a litter before neutering and whether related cats could breed! It demonstrated a clear deficiency in client education, and one that is impacting on feline population figures, and, therefore, welfare.

The speaker also outlined the early neutering programme, which would be of great value to any practice wishing to take this route. She provided a sensible and unquestionable rationale behind the adoption of this practice, and ways to help us achieve this. The Kitten Neutering Database (KiND) website can be found at <http://www.kind.cats.org.uk/>. Practices can join the database and also find more information, resources and support on early neutering; including a really useful Kitten Quad app that works out the doses for the drugs recommended for anaesthesia of kittens. The site really is a useful resource for any small animal practice.

KiND
Kitten Neutering Database

All the talks from the day can be accessed at <http://www.bva-awf.org.uk/2015-discussion-forum> and I would thoroughly recommend taking a look. Why not pick out your favourite topics and have a few 'lunch and learn' sessions with your colleagues?

Looking forward to 2016

The discussion forum is packed with leading figures in the animal welfare sector, and I am always left feeling privileged to have spent a day amongst so many people who have done so much for animal welfare over the years. The day is topped by an evening reception at the House of Commons, which is a fabulous opportunity to socialise with all the attendees within the grand surroundings of the Houses of Parliament, taking in the evening sunshine on the terrace that overlooks the Thames.

We are planning to run the BVNA/AWF forum competition again next year. It will be circulated via our website, social media and e-newsletters nearer the time. The forum is expected to be held around the beginning of June, in London. Even if you're not a lucky winner, at £65 for a day's unique and thought provoking CPD, and an evening on the terrace, I'd advise you put your name down anyway.

Web Links

Animal Welfare Foundation website: <http://www.bva-awf.org.uk/>

Link to all the presentations: <http://www.bva-awf.org.uk/2015-discussion-forum>

Kitten Neutering Database (KiND) resource: <http://www.kind.cats.org.uk/>