



Rob Tillyard

Rob has over 25 years' programming experience and is head of software development at AT Veterinary Systems. He has worked with all major operating systems and has spent over 20 years designing, writing and supporting veterinary software.

A stitch in time saves nine

Rob Tillyard

AT Veterinary Systems, Elmswell, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, IP30 9HR. UK
www.vetsystems.com

ABSTRACT: Producing a fair and flexible rota quickly and efficiently is a daunting prospect for anyone responsible for arranging staff work patterns, but new technology can help.

You've toiled for hours, your eraser has disintegrated, your pencil is an inch shorter, but you've done it! You emerge from your nest of screwed up balls of paper victorious; you've produced a rota that meets the needs of both the practice and the staff, and crucially, no one is expected to be in two places at once.

Then the phone rings; a vet nurse has joined a local netball team and has requested not to work Thursday evenings; a trainee vet nurse has secured a short-notice driving test and is hoping to take a few days off; another colleague is unable to find child cover during half-term. It's back to the drawing board.

There is a solution to the staff rota nightmare. Rota management software makes designing, planning and amending staff rotas straightforward and stress-free.

With a computerised system, alterations to the rota can be made quickly and

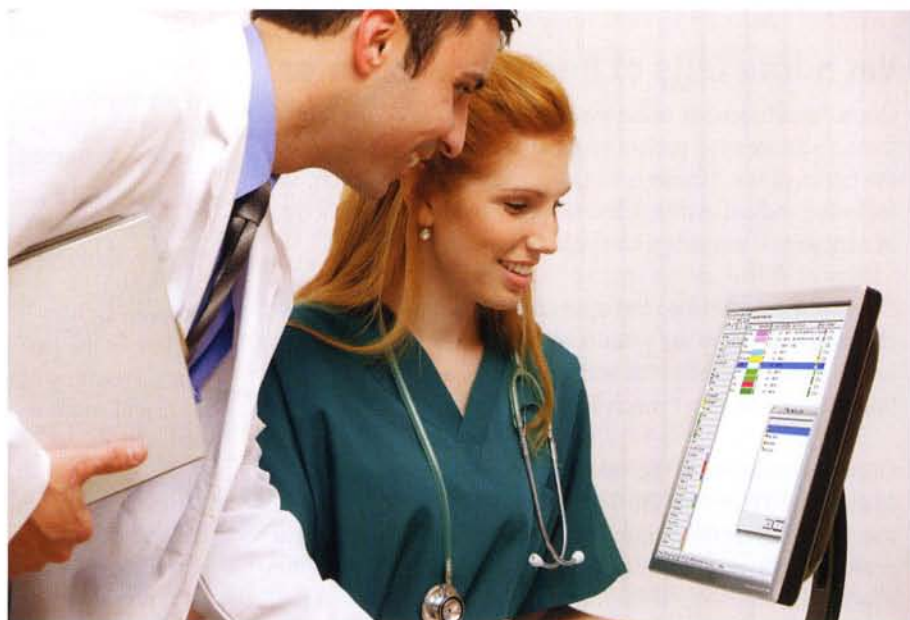
without hassle, thereby keeping members of staff – who may not fully appreciate the complexities that a 'simple' shift swap involves – happy.

Easy way to manage staff rotas

Gone are the days of the humble pen and paper or spreadsheet rota. Rota management software can halve the time it takes to accommodate staff preferences and negotiate working patterns. It makes no difference to a computerised system how many shift patterns and contracted hours it has to work with; rather, it can identify rota gaps, flag time clashes and ensure the practice is neither under- nor over-staffed.

In addition to increased rota accuracy, rota management software allows key employee information – such as days off, holidays taken, training completed, shifts worked – to be accessed and monitored easily.

✔ **Figure 1.** Efficient deployment of staff is a great benefit to the practice



To cite this editorial use either
 DOI: 10.1111/vnj.12041 or Veterinary Nursing
 Journal Vol 28 pp193–194

Indeed, UK and EU requirements and legislation can make rota management a particularly tricky task, especially for practices that provide a 24-hour emergency service. However, with rota reports to hand, you can ensure that staff schedules accommodate contracted hours, as well as adhering to employment legislation.

Happy workforce

There is currently substantial emphasis on the importance of a positive working environment and establishing a healthy work/life balance. Therefore, in a profession that requires constant commitment, a fair and flexible rota is essential for ensuring a happy workforce.

Incorporating staff preferences and flexible working when creating a rota can be a positive motivator, helping a practice to build a valuable, cohesive and loyal team. Accommodating the various requests and working patterns of several individuals is hassle free with a computerised system.

Similarly, rota management software ensures that unpopular shifts – such as bank holidays and nights – are fairly distributed. The accuracy of the rota is therefore assured, and staff can feel safe in the knowledge that any unfair allocations or time clashes will be alerted to the rota organiser. Consequently, fairer rotas can boost staff morale, prevent friction or bad feelings between staff and, in turn, increase staff retention and reduce recruitment costs.

Time saving and cost effective

Negotiating working patterns and staff preferences using the traditional pencil and paper or spreadsheet method involves a great deal of time, effort and energy, and subsequently business demands are not always given adequate attention. A computerised rota system can halve the time it takes to produce a rota, thereby enabling the staff member responsible to put their time towards more vital tasks that can generate revenue for the practice.

Furthermore, when producing a rota becomes a quicker and simpler process, the staff member responsible is free to properly analyse the staffing situation and adopt more effective working arrangements. Having sufficient staff – and sufficient skilled staff – on duty is critical for the veterinary practice. Indeed, clients who face an unexpected wait owing to a lack of ‘on-duty’ vets or vet nurses, for example, may be inclined to take their pet elsewhere.

At the same time, it is financially detrimental for a veterinary practice to be overstaffed. Staffing costs represent a significant proportion of a company’s overall costs; therefore efficient deployment of staff is a great benefit to the practice and its profitability.

Lastly, electronic rotas that can be viewed on multiple desktops and from multiple



Figure 2. Rota management software makes staff rotas straightforward and stress-free

branch surgeries, through a networked system, reduce the need for printed copies, thereby lowering print costs and paper consumption. Similarly, rota management software can allow for rotas to be e-mailed to staff and/or published on a staff intranet. These money-saving methods make for a wealthier workplace, which can ultimately lead to better facilities, better training and a better working environment.

Summary

Creating a rota is a challenging task. However, with rota management software, customised staff rotas that ensure optimum staffing levels, accommodate staff preferences and that are quick and simple to produce are just a few clicks of the mouse away. [vni](#)

NEWS REVIEW by Jean Turner

Vet nurse tells of her ‘lion encounter’

Geeta Sundhoo, a vet nurse living in Northolt, has just returned from a volunteering project in Zambia which aims to secure the future of the African lion. During her three-week stay, she fed cubs, ‘walked’ with adolescent lions and carried out a range of educational projects with the local human population.

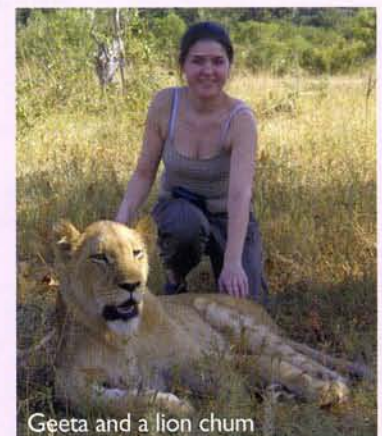
She says the experience has opened her eyes to the real challenges faced by the wildlife of Africa and she’s now urging others to become involved and help create a better future for lions, tigers and other much-loved species.

Geeta is a member of the veterinary nursing team at the Mandeville Veterinary Hospital in Northolt. She has a long-standing interest in wildlife conservation and it was this that prompted her to volunteer with charity Lion Encounter. The charity aims to reintroduce the offspring of captive-bred lions

back into the wild and has two bases, one in Zambia, which is where Geeta volunteered.

“People think that there are lots of lions in Africa, but in fact, the species has seen an 80 – 90% decline in the past 30 years. Poaching is a big issue and many local people still kill them because they are seen as a threat,” she explains.

“These magnificent animals, together with many others, deserve a future and I wanted to do my bit to help. Working with them was an experience I’ll never forget. Feeding the cubs was a particularly memorable experience!”



Geeta and a lion chum