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Nicky is the owner of HR Support Consultancy. She has a BA(Hons) in Business Studies, is a member of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and has been a practising HR manager for more than 20 years. HR Support Consultancy has provided the BVNA Members Advisory Service (formerly known as the Industrial Relations Service) since it began in 2002.

Should I attend an Investigation Meeting?

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The BVNA Helpline is often contacted by Veterinary Nurses who are worried that they have been invited to attend an investigation meeting and they ask should they attend. The answer is yes.

An investigation meeting, is just that an investigation. It does not mean that the person invited to attend the meeting is guilty, it means that an allegation has been made or an incident has occurred, and the facts need to be established before any decision is made as to whether any further action would be necessary. In some cases, this will require the holding of an investigatory meeting with the employee before proceeding to any disciplinary hearing. In others, the investigatory stage will be the collation of evidence by the practice for use at any disciplinary hearing.

Investigation meetings are normally held if the practice feels that an act of misconduct has occurred.

If there is an investigatory meeting this should not by itself result in any disciplinary action. Although there is no statutory right for an employee to be accompanied at a formal investigatory meeting, such a right may be allowed under the practice's own procedure.

You may be called into the office by the Practice Manager / Head Nurse or you may receive a letter in writing inviting you to attend a meeting. The meeting should be held by the person carrying out the investigation and they will probably have someone with them taking notes or alternatively you may be asked to write a statement regarding the incident.

Examples of why you may be called to a meeting:

1. Two nurses have been seen arguing and raising their voices in an aggressive manner in reception and a customer has written a letter of complaint to the practice.

Firstly, the practice needs to establish who the two nurses were. To be able to do this they would have to speak to all the staff on duty that day and ask them all if they had witnessed the incident and to clarify who the two nurses were. If any of the members of staff had witnessed the incident they may be asked to submit a written statement or attend an investigation meeting. This would then be used as evidence at the disciplinary hearing.

2. It had been noticed that the wrong medication had been supplied to a vet by a nurse assisting in an operation. This had been reported to the Head Nurse.

The practice would have to carry out an investigation with both the vet and the nurse to establish if there was a case of negligence. Both parties would need to be asked about their version of events. Either notes would be taken at the meeting or they would be requested to provide a written statement. These statements would then be used as evidence, if it is decided that disciplinary action is to be taken against one or both of the parties.

If following the investigation meeting it is decided that disciplinary action is to be taken. The veterinary nurse should receive a formal letter from the practice, explaining the reason for the disciplinary action, advising the right to representation and copies of any evidence that will be used at the disciplinary hearing so that they are able to prepare for the hearing.

The process above should also be used for carrying out an investigation following a formal grievance.

Members of the BVNA can contact the Helpline for free advice and support. Please call 01822 870270 or email nickyackerley@hrsupportconsultancy.co.uk