



Robyn McCurry

Robyn is the Head Veterinary Nurse in a small animal practice. She is a clinical coach to two nursing students and has a passion for mentoring and teaching. She also has completed a certificate in anaesthesia and achieved the Advanced programme veterinary nursing (zoo) qualification. Robyn has an interest in emergency medicine, and enjoys learning about the management side of veterinary practice

Email: robyn.mccurry@crownvets.co.uk

How to survive and thrive in the workplace

Robyn McCurry

Crown Vets, Inverness, UK

ABSTRACT: Navigating any workplace can be hard; Registered Veterinary Nurses (RVNs) are highly skilled, trained and ultimately just want to do the best for patients. However, in practice there may be times when it feels difficult to perform nursing duties because of interpersonal dynamics. This article will explore how to work effectively as a member of the veterinary team. It will address conflict, bullying and finally, it will look at what to do and what not to do in a workplace environment to help in more challenging situations.

Keywords: conflict; team work; workplace

Introduction

It can be difficult to navigate working in a team, whether a Registered Veterinary Nurse (RVN) has been qualified for 1 year or 25 years. There are many different personalities, workloads can vary, and the veterinary industry is very emotionally draining. With veterinary nursing being a small profession, it is important RVNs' are not leaving the profession because of workplace dynamics. This article is a guide on how to navigate difficult workplace scenarios such as conflict with a colleague, how to work in a team and what to do and what not to do in a professional practice, so that a more positive work environment can be experienced.

Conflict in a team

Working in a veterinary practice is all about teamwork. The practice team is made up of RVNs, vets, students, receptionists and support staff. There are a lot of people to interact with and not all personalities are going to work well together. Eighty five percent of employees in a workplace experience conflict (Short, 2016). This can cause problems for individuals and the practice, leading to a downfall in productivity and a breakdown in communication; it can also lead to arguments and an uncomfortable environment for the whole team.

Having a safe psychological environment is imperative in any workplace. A survey of 667 veterinary staff members was conducted and it was reported that 343 members of staff were aware of other staff members speaking negatively about them when they were not around. 297 members of staff felt

excluded or ignored (Everitt, 2017). In an exceedingly small profession, it is important that all staff members are treated with respect and if this is not being upheld, then it should be flagged up.

Raising an issue can be a stressful process, but it is important to do so if the individual is starting to suffer as a result of negativity caused by others. If there are issues that need addressing some steps to start the process include:

1. Start by raising the issue informally with the initial line manager such as the head nurse; this could be done through an informal chat. This might resolve the issue quickly without it becoming formal.
2. In times when an informal discussion over an issue does not feel appropriate, then, it can be raised formally. This should be done as soon as possible so it can be addressed at the time, it is always good practice to have written correspondence (such as an email) to ensure a record is kept (ACAS, 2020). This could be approached by writing an email to management addressing issues or have a formal meeting with management where minutes are taken. This could include the practice manager or clinical director, if warranted, for example, if the issue is with the initial line manager or there has been no progress made on the line managers' behalf.

When an employee is unhappy at work, the individual should still try and keep up a level of professionalism, as a negative attitude can

have a detrimental effect to the individual. It may also be worth self-reflecting to see what it is that is causing the unhappiness and ensuring that the individual is actively contributing to the solution of the issue (Olsen, 2009).

Bullying in the workplace is unacceptable and should not be stood for. It does not matter who the person is, the experience or position held, bullying has no place in the workplace, and must be dealt with seriously. If it is experienced first-hand or was witnessed, tell management- never be a bystander! Examples of bullying include:

- Facing constant criticism
- Aggressive behaviour (this could be storming about, slamming cupboards or doors)
- Gossip being spread about an individual
- Mocking behaviour
- Abuse of power

These are just a few examples of what bullying in the workplace can look like but there are many more (“Bullying at work - the signs | Family Lives” (Bullying.co.uk., 2021)).

Remember- If bullying is not being dealt with or taken seriously, then sometimes the best course of action could be looking for a more supportive practice.

Resilience in the workplace can help in challenging or difficult times; resilience involves being able to cope with stress in a manageable way. Ways to help to build resilience include:

- Have a support network available
- Understand that sometimes things do go wrong and there is not anything that can be done to change that
- Try and remember the reason or purpose for joining the profession
- Practise self-care (Poli, 2020)

How to work in a team

The main ingredient when it comes to teamwork is communication. Communication is derivative of the Latin word to share; this involves sharing idea or concepts, information, verbally or written (Entrepreneur Handbook, 2021). A good team that can communicate with one another decreases the likelihood of mistakes (Robson, 2016). Good communication skills involve;

- Listening
- Seeing things from a different point of view and compromise
- Encouraging others with no put-downs (5 Ways to Define Good Communication

|Effective Communication Skills (Touro University WorldWide, 2021)

Attributes to working in a team involve;

- Flexibility, being able to adapt and improvise if things do not go as planned
- Being able to give complimentary criticism, for example, being able to give feedback in a courteous way and being able to receive feedback without being defensive will help communication
- Owning up to any mistake and avoid “blame culture”
- Knowing one’s strengths and weaknesses (Marano, 2020).

If a team is needing some encouragement, then reminding the team of the goal in front of them can be helpful (Heathfield, 2021) Having that reminder can focus the attention back to the task at hand (providing the best care to patients) and not to any conflict or gossip that may be circulating around. One idea to motivate the team and is all inclusive of every member of the practice is to put up a picture of a success story of a patient and write a little information about how it was the whole team that contributed to saving that animal’s life.

Having a staff “shout out” board could also be beneficial; staff can write out positive messages or quotes to each other. This is a simple idea which can help boost team moral.

Top Tip- In a professional environment, friendships can be difficult, and it is an unachievable task to befriend everyone. Keep a professional manner around staff, rather than try to be everyone’s friend.

What to do and what not to do in a workplace environment

It can be quite easy to forget how to conduct oneself at work. However, a workplace is still a Workplace; below details what to do and what not to do in a professional environment.

Do:

- Always maintain a professional manner
- Speak to management or a trusted confidant if advice and support is needed
- Where possible, keep personal matters out of the workplace. If support is needed, find a suitable person to confide in

- Report inappropriate behaviour to a member of the management team, at the time that it happens
- Remember that feeling content in the workplace is important
- Take five minutes or step back from a situation if needed.

Do not:

- Spread gossip-gossip is toxic and harmful to others
- Engage in conflict-always leave an escalating situation and seek management’s help
- Retaliate against a colleague. If a negative experience has occurred, rise above it and speak to someone who can provide support. Do not act in an unprofessional manner as this can reflect negatively on the individual
- Constantly complain about issues to other staff members as this can have a wind-up effect on the rest of the team and damage team morale. Speak to management instead
- Use profanities or offensive language.

Conclusion

Navigating any workplace can be difficult, however, with good communication and teamwork the workplace can be positive. In the workplace, it is always important to remain professional and remember the Do’s and Don’ts as these can easily be forgotten in highly emotional situations. If there are any issues or situations that are causing distress and/or affecting work performance, these need to be addressed. Raising a complaint can be stressful but it is better that it is dealt with than left to carry on. Bullying, on the other hand, has no place in any environment and must be reported. Reflecting on workplace behaviour and having regular discussions in the team and with management can make an improvement to the workplace and make surviving it a little easier.

Organisations that can provide support

- **Vetlife**-<https://www.vetlife.org.uk/>
- **Mind**-<https://www.mind.org.uk/>
- **Samaritans**-<https://www.samaritans.org/?nation=scotland>
- **ACA**-<https://www.acas.org.uk/advice>
- **Local GP**

Disclosure statement

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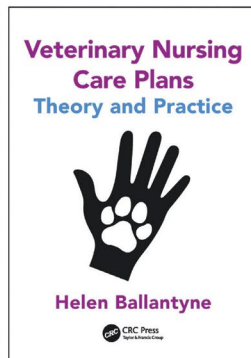
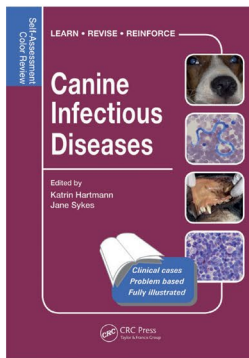
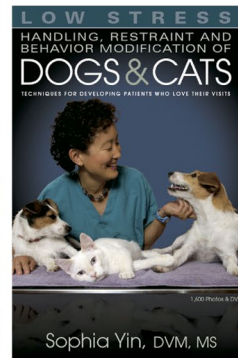
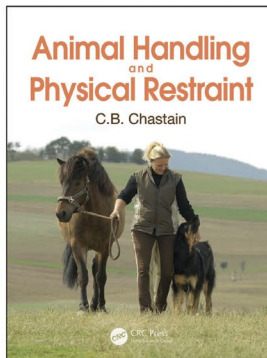
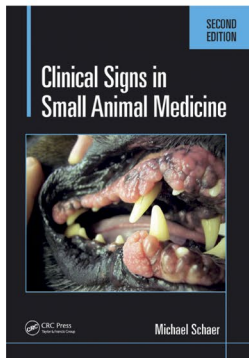
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