

The logo consists of a large light blue circle containing a smaller, vibrant blue circle. The text 'vet wellbeing awards 2019' is centered within the inner circle in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

**vet
wellbeing
awards
2019**

**How
happy
is your
practice?**



Welcome to the Vet Wellbeing Awards 2019

We are proud to be launching the fourth year of the joint Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons Mind Matters Initiative (MMI) and Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons (SPVS) Wellbeing Awards, which aim to recognise veterinary employers who are doing their utmost to ensure that the wellbeing of their team is considered in all aspects of the business.

Work-related stress and its fallout, for example, poor mental health and poor retention of veterinary professionals, are problems in the veterinary professions and we need to continue to work on talking about the positives of veterinary work and identify best practice in addressing these issues. After the Mind Matters Initiative was launched in 2015, to start addressing how mental wellbeing can be better supported in the veterinary professions, it soon partnered with SPVS to develop and promote the Wellbeing Awards.

When they were first launched in 2016 the aim of the awards was

to recognise those practices with management systems and initiatives that motivate and engage their staff, and who can demonstrate their commitment to being a place to work in which staff wellbeing is supported.

Over the years the awards have continued to evolve and now even greater emphasis is placed on a more holistic approach to wellbeing and to reflect this we are looking for evidence that workplaces are devoted to improving wellbeing, reducing work-related stress and creating a healthy and fulfilling atmosphere.

We are looking for practices, protocols, policies and initiatives that address some of the tough issues around the veterinary workplace and veterinary work, as well as having in place 'nice to have' initiatives such as fresh fruit bowls or free staff massages.

Wellbeing shouldn't be seen as a luxury that only practices with the most resources (whether that's in terms of money, people or time) can invest in - there are very practical and hard-headed reasons for all

employers to improve wellbeing, as Professor Elinor O'Connor, Professor of Occupational Psychology at Alliance Manchester Business School, details in an article in this booklet. Her research demonstrates that improving wellbeing has a positive impact on retention rates, reducing stress and improving team spirit. In fact, we are indebted to Elinor who has brought her wisdom, counsel and academic rigour to helping develop these awards.

Of course winning is great, but entering the awards in itself is a worthwhile exercise as it allows practices to benchmark where they are via the awards questionnaire. And the awards not only recognise those who are doing great things, but, by publishing the winners' stories, encourage other veterinary businesses to take steps to improve what they do.

We would like to thank the previous winners of the awards who have been enthusiastically helping us to promote good practice by agreeing to be interviewed, photographed and recorded talking about what a focus

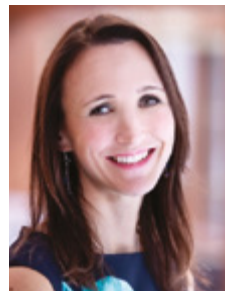
on wellbeing has meant to them and their teams.

We look forward to receiving your submissions for the Vet Wellbeing Awards and seeing what you do to ensure yours is a happy, healthy and fulfilling workplace. If you have any questions about the awards and their criteria please contact us on lisa@vetmindmatters.org and liz.barton@vetsnet.net respectively.

Thank you,



Lisa Quigley
Mind Matters
Initiative Manager



Liz Barton
SPVS Board
Member

Vet Wellbeing Awards

How to apply



Vet Wellbeing Awards are now in their fourth year, and are run jointly by the Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons (SPVS) and the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons Mind Matters Initiative. These timely awards arose out of a desire to recognise the positive steps that veterinary

workplaces are taking towards supporting the wellbeing of their employees. The Vet Wellbeing Awards are open to UK veterinary practices of all sizes. Every member of the team is encouraged to take part in entering. There are three awards presented, for best small practice, medium practice and large practice.

HOW TO APPLY

If you feel your practice is a happy place to work, why not apply? You can apply via our online form, which can be found on our website: vetwellbeingawards.org.uk.

We advise that, before applying for an award, you organise a team meeting to brainstorm, share ideas and generate feedback from as many team members as possible. We also recommend that you compile your set of answers in a Word document, and then copy and paste each answer into the online application form.

When completing your application, guidelines to follow are:

- 1. We recommend that a number of colleagues are involved in completing the application, rather than it being completed by one person.**
- 2. Some questions require a simple 'yes', 'no' or 'not applicable' answer, but most questions request brief details and a relevant example from your workplace. Your answers can be written in note or bullet form.**
- 3. When giving examples of what your practice does to support wellbeing, it is useful to describe the impact these actions have.**
- 4. Try to avoid re-using examples**

in your answers to different questions.

- 5. Applications should be anonymous; please do not include the name of your practice or any details that might allow it to be identified. For reasons of confidentiality, please take care not to include names or identifying details of any individuals in your application.**

Prior to submission, it's beneficial to get extra feedback from different members of your team, or different departments, as colleagues may well have unique experiences of the practice. The more contributors, the better!

WELLBEING AWARDS CHECKLIST

The application form covers six key aspects of work that, if well-managed, can promote wellbeing and reduce the risk of work-related stress. These are:

1. Promoting physical and psychological health at work

Promoting healthy-eating and good hydration can assist in mental wellbeing for employees, as well as looking into stress-management initiatives. Keeping active during the day can also increase wellbeing, for example, encouraging group walks during lunch hours. This is also great for team bonding. Mindfulness and



The impact on award winners

Awards like this are important because they set a precedent in the industry – they say, ‘this is worth prioritising!’ They’re an industry-led recognition of a systemic problem. And I think this will hopefully make other practices sit up and say, ‘OK this is a big thing’. The awards lend validity and credence to beliefs that have been held for a long time. They lend validity to the claims that, actually, we do need to feel happy and fulfilled at work.

Ami Sawran, Westpoint Farm Vets
(Winner, Small Practice, 2018)

It was a really fantastic boost to morale: being an ambulatory team, we have to work harder to ensure individuals feel supported and engaged. Even just working through the questions raised positive feedback from the team.

Sophie Aylett, Meadows Farm Vets
(Winner, Small Practice, 2018)

It gave us an overwhelming sense of pride that we were recognised for taking care of each other, which is great for our team members and great for our bottom line too. We’re still pinching ourselves!

Tracey Morley-Jewkes, Blacks Vets
(Joint Winner, Large Practice, 2017)

meditation at work is also an effective technique for increasing feelings of positivity and calm.

Each of these aspects of work is described in more detail in the application form, which will help you to identify examples of what your practice is doing to support wellbeing.

2. Relationships at work

Organising shared breaks for colleagues can create a sense of connection and increase wellbeing at work. Face-to-face interactions with

colleagues tend to offer a deeper sense of connection with your team and your work than communicating over email or text. Putting an effective bullying and harassment policy in place, of which all employees are aware, is important for wellbeing.

3. Communication at work

Regular team meetings and updates help increase positive communication amongst employees. Providing all employees with the opportunity to comment on the way work is carried out leads to a greater sense of inclusion and wellbeing.



4. Career development

Induction support, supervision and regular appraisals all lead to increased positivity as colleagues feel nurtured within their roles. Providing training opportunities for employees can increase motivation. Providing extra training and ongoing support for employees can lead to greater wellbeing and knowing that you team is there to support you is key.

5. Workload and work scheduling

Providing all employees with the opportunity for regular breaks has been shown to reduce stress, and

supporting and encouraging a positive work-life balance is essential. For example, introducing flexible working can make a significant difference.

6. Work demands

By its nature, veterinary work can involve potentially stressful experiences such as working with clients who may be upset or distressed, exposure to animal suffering, and managing cases in which taxing complications occur. Measures to help colleagues manage these demands can support wellbeing.

Case studies

Westpoint Farm Vets – 2018 Small Practice Category winner

For Westpoint Farm Vets, supporting the mental health and wellbeing of staff starts with creating a culture with wellbeing at its centre, which continuously focuses on and supports initiatives that improve this.

At the practice, speaking openly with staff about what they think would improve workplace wellbeing is crucial to creating this culture. This helps define priorities and initiatives, which then get trialled, making sure to check in with employees during the trial period and involve them in the process. The practice is really cognisant that giving staff agency and responsibility over their own ideas is essential for wellbeing.

One example of an initiative that was introduced through this process was the creation of a staff 'chill-out' space in the office. It was a relatively affordable option for the practice to pursue, and changed the dynamics of the space – whether staff needed five minutes of time to chill out or if they needed a change of space to work from for a few hours, this space made a real difference. The practice also has structured appraisal systems and monthly team meetings, where they always aim to 'give something back' to staff and address wellbeing.

The practice also operates a 'zero



Ami Sawran, Westpoint Farm Vets

blame culture', using a 360-degree feedback system to ensure that feedback isn't only going in one direction – with feedback being driven by 'what can we do for you' instead of 'what are you doing for us'. This is to ensure that staff feel supported by their managers and not blamed. This also helps drive an environment of being open and receptive to feedback, and ensuring that feedback always comes from a positive and constructive place.

"Winning a wellbeing award is not a done deal – it is an ongoing process, and we recognise that. Going forward, it's about keeping momentum up and maintaining the things we're doing, as well as thinking of new ideas. We're also keen to offer advice to other practices about increasing employee wellbeing - I think it's important to note that starting a conversation is hard, but as long as vets feel listened to, valued and fulfilled, then you're going the right way," Ami Sawran, Westpoint Farm Vets.

Beaumont Sainsbury Animal Hospital, RVC – 2018 Medium Practice category winner

Beaumont Sainsbury Animal Hospital, at the Royal Veterinary College, places a particular focus on communication to support mental health and wellbeing.

The hospital strives to facilitate an open attitude to talking about mental health, with regular discussions within teams and with students to promote active and preventative measures for maintaining good wellbeing. The hospital has also put in place a Mental Health Awareness Board to develop self-care resources and ideas for stress management within the practice.

The hospital offers fortnightly psychological health drop-in sessions where a qualified psychologist is on-site to talk and provide support, and all employees have 24/7 free support and counselling services available for their use.

If a member of the team does have to take time off, dedicated attention is paid to ensure staff feel supported on their return to work. This can include regular 'keeping in touch' calls and using a wellness recovery action plan for staff with mental health conditions to ensure they are comfortable with their health and wellbeing upon their return.

The practice has structures in place to ensure every team member has the chance to provide feedback, and



The Beaumont Sainsbury Animal Hospital Team winning their award

regular team meetings are held to look at what is working and what needs to be improved.

In addition to this, the hospital has also taken steps to support mental wellbeing through a range of initiatives that strive to make the hospital a great place to work. For example, the hospital has an on-site gym that is free for staff to use and it also participates in the ride-to-work scheme offering financial support for cycle purchase. The hospital also fosters an inclusive and celebratory environment by organising a monthly social activity for all staff and making sure to celebrate individual achievements, such as positive customer reviews.

The hospital has a culture of respect, support, open-mindedness and kindness to other team members, and is constantly keeping these values in mind when developing mental health initiatives.

Drove Veterinary Hospital – 2018 Large Practice category winner

Drove Veterinary Hospital uses their 'Thriving in Practice' scheme to keep staff connected and raise awareness and support for mental health and wellbeing.

The hospital implemented the scheme to drive initiatives that support the five ways to wellbeing: connecting, exercising, learning, giving to others and being mindful. The scheme is continuously promoted by the hospital's Thriving in Practice Co-ordinator, who distributes monthly emails on the importance of mental health within the veterinary professions. Articles and posters with mental wellbeing information and tips are also highlighted throughout the hospital and the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) support scheme, available to all staff, is advertised on posters in all branches.

Activities are organised as part of the Thriving in Practice scheme, which aims to bring staff together and support wellbeing. For example, the hospital organises yoga courses available for all staff, dog walks, pub quizzes, barbeques and dragon boating, in addition to financially supporting smaller activity groups managed by staff.

During Mental Health Awareness Week, the hospital dedicated a day to each of the different areas of wellbeing. For example, on day three, which represented 'connecting', staff were encouraged to visit different branches, build relationships,



The Drove Veterinary Hospital team

and do something nice for each other – with some teams going out for dinner, others exchanging gifts and some teams baking for support staff.

The hospital also strives to support mental wellbeing through ensuring workload is managed to minimise stress, and build a team environment where staff feel that they can share feedback. This is facilitated through regular meetings to discuss possible improvements, and through continuously reviewing branch statistics to evaluate resourcing levels to make sure workload is manageable.

Finally, the hospital has a culture that celebrates success and achievements, which is particularly encouraged by the practice leadership. Each team manager is allocated a budget for small thank you gifts, a company quarterly newsletter helps to share achievements and every branch has an 'Above and beyond' board on display where staff can leave thank you messages and stories of jobs well done.

The case for enhancing wellbeing at work

Well-organised work in a good working environment has a positive impact on wellbeing. However, even when we normally enjoy our work, every job can be demanding and involve less pleasant experiences at times. If we perceive that the demands of our work are beyond our ability to cope, the result may be that we feel stressed. Stress is distinct from work demands that the person experiences as challenging, but with which they believe they can cope; indeed, these can be motivating and help us to achieve our goals. Common sources of work-related stress across different occupational sectors and jobs include high workload, limited control at work, and poor relationships with colleagues.

It is well established that frequent or prolonged exposure to stressful situations at work can affect health and wellbeing. Research evidence shows that, in the shorter term, the effects of stress can include anxiety, sleep disturbance, and gastro-intestinal disorders, with outcomes in the longer term including depression and cardiovascular disease. In 2017, stress accounted for 40% of cases of work-related ill-health diagnosed by general practitioners in the UK according to the Health & Safety Executive (HSE). Given its implications for individuals' health and

wellbeing, the ethical case for addressing work stress is beyond question.

Aside from the benefits to individual workers when organisations seek to address work stress, there is a clear business case for enhancing wellbeing at work. Stress reduces individuals' engagement with their work, which has implications for performance and productivity. Stress is associated with increased absenteeism – in 2016-17, according to the HSE, 12.5 million working days in the UK were lost to work-related stress. Work stress is also linked with increased employee turnover. All of these compromise organisational effectiveness.

Finally, under the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999), UK employers have a legal duty to protect the health and welfare of their workers, which includes managing hazards to psychological wellbeing. Organisations employing five or more people are required to have a written health and safety policy that identifies hazards to workers' health and wellbeing and sets out the actions taken to reduce risks.

Professor Elinor O'Connor, Professor of Occupational Psychology at Alliance Manchester Business School



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