Caring for carers: understanding emotional labour and supporting staff

Rosie Allister

This session looks at the evidence on the impact of companion animal euthanasia on veterinary staff wellbeing and mental health, and explores emotional and psychological consequences of the demands that can occur in veterinary work, including emotional work in supporting bereaved clients and the need to support one another as colleagues.

It explores how the human-animal bond and the relationships clients have with their animals can affect the work we do, and how our own values and beliefs can affect our wellbeing.

The session focuses on what helps, including practical tips to help support colleagues. It explores the concept of emotional labour — the work of managing emotions in dealings with customers or employees, and how compassionate effective line management can help, including practical steps managers can take to promote workplace wellbeing.

KEY LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Review the evidence around veterinary mental health and wellbeing, including the types of

adversity that can impact veterinary mental health

- Understand the concept of emotional labour and what it means in veterinary practice
- Explore techniques for supporting staff in demanding roles

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Which of the following is an example of emotional labour?
 - (A) Maintaining a calm professional demeanour during a difficult euthanasia
 - (B) Making jokes at a staff party
 - (C) Letting off steam
 - (D) Learning about mental health topics
2. Does companion animal euthanasia have a positive or negative impact on the wellbeing of veterinary staff?
 - (A) Solely positive
 - (B) Solely negative
 - (C) We don't know
 - (D) Can be both positive and negative
3. What would be a warning sign for stress in a colleague?
 - (A) Talking to colleagues about difficult situations
 - (B) Scheduling holidays in advance
 - (C) Leaving on time
 - (D) Trouble concentrating

Compassion fatigue: what is it and how can you help?

Rosie Allister

This session looks at how to identify stress, burnout, compassion fatigue, moral distress or moral injury, and how and why it is important to differentiate them. We review evidence from the veterinary sector looking at veterinary-specific risks as well as factors present in many workplaces.

The session also addresses some areas of confusion in this field. Burnout is often misunderstood and attributed to individual characteristics, or described as a 'disease' affecting individuals, whereas it is important to understand it as a system-level issue with system-level solutions. We also consider confusion around compassion fatigue, and why it matters for veterinary professionals to understand factors affecting workplace health.

The session reviews what both workplaces and individuals can do if they identify concerns. It also looks at what can cause compassion fatigue, how to identify it and what can help to prevent it. It also takes a practical approach to what to do if you or a colleague experience it. Using scenario-based case studies, this session gives you a chance to identify and decide on steps for designing a practice plan for support and prevention.

KEY LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Review the evidence around burnout, compassion fatigue and wellbeing
- Understand the concept of compassion fatigue and what it means in veterinary practice
- Explore ways to prevent or address compassion fatigue, at the workplace and individual level

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Which of the following are signs of burnout?
 - (A) Exhaustion, cynicism, ineffectiveness
 - (B) Depression

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