Resilience in practice

Everyone knows what it is when they see it – yet few of us would be able to come up with a concise and accurate definition of what is meant by the term psychological resilience. The BSAVA and RCVS have joined forces to support a series of resilience training sessions to help you cope when the going gets tough. John Bonner reports.

Gavin Dowie, the former Crystal Palace football club manager, probably put it most succinctly when he used the memorably alliterative ‘bouncebackability’ to describe his team’s performance. It is the capacity that allows people to ‘roll with the punches’ and adapt to the many misfortunes that life will throw at them. And it is also a quality that most of us would assume is just like sporting talent, something that can be perfected through practice, but only if you were born with an innate gift.

But they would be wrong. While there is evidence of a small genetic component to resilience, it is very much an acquired trait. That is why the BSAVA is supporting a series of three training days on developing emotional and psychological resilience. Delegates will be taught some techniques that will help build-up their own resilience and learn how to help any colleagues that may be suffering from the lack of this quality, which may lead to clinical depression – and worse.

The three sessions in Derby, Bristol and Basingstoke on November 4, 11 and 29 are being run in collaboration with the Northern Ireland-based organization PIPS (Public Initiative for Prevention of Suicide and Self-harm). Established in Belfast in 2009, PIPS has been providing training in emotional health and safety for the police, staff and students at universities and secondary schools, and more recently at veterinary institutions like the Glasgow veterinary school and the Royal Veterinary College.

Eddie Bannon, Director of the PIPS programmes, will be the facilitator at all three events. He says the training methods are founded on solid evidence gained from a major study of more than 1500 children and adolescents in 11 countries, called the International Resilience Project. “This concluded that emotional/psychological resilience was primarily learned behaviour and they were able to identify how it developed and what was needed in your early life to develop higher levels of resilience.”

He says it is important to understand that resilience is not a static quality and will go up and down but we can all take steps to increase our capacity for dealing with life’s problems. So even those people with a seemingly gloomy disposition can benefit from training that will work towards developing their sunnier side. This will help the people around them, as well as themselves.
– “someone with a hard-wired negative outlook is likely to have learned psychological pessimism from one of their parents and is likely to be passing it on to their own children,” he says.

**Look, Listen, Link**

In both its resilience training and in the accompanying programmes aimed at reducing the suicide risk among people with clinical depression, PIPS uses a system known as ‘Look, Listen, Link’. Bannon explains that these methods are designed to help all members of the practice team. It isn’t intended that a single day’s training will turn everyone attending into an expert on mental health – the idea is help them better understand the causes and effects of psychological illness and to know where they can go for help for themselves or their colleagues.

He will explain what recent research has revealed about building resilience in the general population and on the particular issues facing the veterinary profession. But the format is more of an interactive workshop than a formal lecture. Those attending will be divided into groups to discuss the risk factors in their own working lives. He points out that no personal disclosures are necessary, although participants are welcome to discuss private issues after the programme is finished.

**How to build-up resilience**

The training aims to help participants create a recovery plan to build-up resilience based on four elements – Vision, Changes, Action, Help. “We get people to build the map backwards by starting with a vision of when you have achieved something (e.g. ‘I will feel happier’) then stepping backwards and identifying the two or three things which must be changed to make you feel happier. Then we step back again and for each required change we identify achievable actions. You then need to identify the help and resources needed to undertake those actions.”

Treatment is likely to involve a combination of different methods, including counselling, antidepressants, mindfulness training, increased physical activity and reduced alcohol intake, Bannon says. The combination will need to be shaped to the particular needs of the patients, as not every option is equally effective – for example, antidepressants will only work in around one in three people that are given them, he notes.

He adds that cognitive behavioural therapy is the form of counselling most readily available through the NHS but long waiting lists may be a major barrier. “So we talk through alternative sources including Vetlife healthcare support, which is available free for all members of the veterinary family. There are other organizations such as the mental health charity MIND, which provides counselling. There are also the employment assistance programmes that practices may have signed up to and finally, you can simply pay for counselling, as even psychiatric help can be organized privately.”

**Sign up for resilience training**

All are welcome to attend the sessions that are FREE to BSAVA members and just £40 for non-members.

The training day starts at 10 am and finishes at 5 pm, with two coffee breaks and an hour for lunch in between. The course is designed for the whole practice team and participants work in groups. No personal disclosures are necessary although participants are welcome to discuss private issues after the programme finishes.

**Resilience training dates**

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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Monday 4 November</td>
<td>East Midlands</td>
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<td>Monday 11 November</td>
<td>South West</td>
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<td>Friday 29 November</td>
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Further dates and locations to follow in 2020.