

## CMA Feedback from reports 17.03.25

### Introduction

BVRA was founded in October 2017 with the mission to support and raise the profile of veterinary receptionists through training, education and development. With nearly 7,000 members, BVRA provides a community for veterinary receptionists. BVRA provides a wealth of CPD courses as well as holding the Register of Associate Veterinary Receptionists (AVRs). BVRA membership is available for anyone who works in a front of house role which may include veterinary nurses, veterinary care assistants or anyone in an admin role.

Our **vision** is to support veterinary receptionists and ensure the best possible outcomes for all stakeholders in veterinary practices.

Our **mission** is to increase the value and visibility of Veterinary Receptionists, through a structured support network and targeted skills development.

### First impressions and good will

Receptionists are usually the first and last person in contact with the client, it's estimated that up to 66% of the client's interaction is with the non-clinical staff, mainly the receptionist. They are the face of the practice, and generally the first impression and the lasting impression of the practice is based on this interaction.

In the CMA's own feedback pet owners said that *'location was the most common main reason for choosing a particular practice, followed by personal recommendations.'* Personal recommendations are very often based on the performance of the front of house staff rather than the clinical staff, as it is difficult for a lay person to judge the quality of the clinical care. In addition, the RCVS own feedback says *'We do appreciate that non-clinical factors play a part in owners' initial choice of practice'.*

In the CMA feedback, there is discussion about the value of vet practices and their balance sheets, so it is worth looking at 'goodwill accounting' where two of the critical factors are customer loyalty and strong customer service. Again, receptionists are critical in this respect and often are the only continuity of contact between clients and practices where clinical staff changes, and the use of locums is common. Many receptionists have a 'lifetime' relationship with their clients which is increasingly rarer for the clinical staff.

## **Staff shortages**

CMA initial report *"We intend to explore the shortages in the supply of vets and whether any changes in regulations, policies or incentives might be able to address this, either by increasing the supply of vets, by improving retention or by allowing professionals other than veterinary surgeons to carry out certain treatments."*

In the joint BVA, BSAVA, BVNA, SPVS & VMG feedback, it was suggested *'If there was an unlimited supply of vets and RVNs, practices could seek to expand supply, delivering higher volume at lower prices, and the number of start-ups could expand further.'*

An efficiently run vet practice, of which receptionists play a crucial role, can help with the retention of clinical staff. For example, the efficient scheduling of appointments, allowing the correct amount of time to be allocated and providing the correct information in advance to clients, for example the rules around taking pets abroad. This not only impacts the economic efficiency of a practice but the overall staff well-being which is a big factor in all staff retention.

The RCVS is also looking at the regulation of the 'vet-led team'. *'This would mean the inclusion under our regulatory umbrella of appropriately trained professionals, and strengthening and developing the role of veterinary nurses, which will bring benefits to animal owners.* Whilst receptionists, will not be covered under this regulatory framework as vets and RVNs, and will never be involved in clinical judgements, their role should be looked at as part of the overall solution to some of these challenges including an acknowledgement of some of the work they already do, such as helping to restrain animals. This could then support the proposed intention of *'(a) enabling new ways of accessing services, and potentially more cost-effective forms of service delivery for consumers; (b) freeing up vets' time in an under-staffed profession allowing more efficient use of resources and easing workforce-related pressures; and (c) increased job satisfaction, career progression and earning potential (potentially improving staff retention).*

## **The wider receptionist role**

Whilst RVNs, *'play an important role in the education of pet owners, including in relation to preventative healthcare'*, it is also often the receptionist that supports this role, or for example might greet an animal in reception, notice it's discoloured teeth or bad breath, and suggest the client might want another appointment with a relevant clinician or suggest a readily available 'non-prescription' product for teeth care.

It is also worth noting some of the additional roles some receptionists already do, such as the management and dispensing of drugs (not the prescribing) which is obviously of critical importance. Being the first point of contact, most receptionist have to deal with the initial triaging of calls, especially potential emergency calls, when booking the correct appointment or understanding the need to urgently refer to the clinical staff can be a matter of life and death for the patient. This may become even more crucial with new development and delivery models such as telemedicine.

## Customer Information

CMA says: *“The evidence we gather throughout our investigation will help us to explore what information consumers might find useful at different points in the treatment of their pet, and how that information might best be presented. We will also consider opportunities to conduct research on the likely effectiveness of potential information and transparency remedies, including to ensure they are designed in a way that enhances their effectiveness for consumers.”*

Whilst it will always be clinical staff making clinical decisions and recommending treatment options, it is often the receptionist who act as a bridge or interpreter to the client and may need to reaffirm what the clinical staff have said, in layman's terms, or recommend a further discussion with the clinician. They are also the ones dealing with the bill payer, many of whom can be in a highly emotional state, and even if the potential fees have been explained in advance, or displayed on a website, the charges often require further clarification and the explanations can also be nuanced depending on animal size, reaction to treatment etc. As highlighted in your working documents *‘These problems are exacerbated by the fact that often in markets for credence goods the consumer is unable to assess the quality of the product they have received even after trade has concluded’*.

## Summary

The BVRA would like to acknowledge and support the work of the CMA enquiry and also highlight the crucial role that receptionists and client care staff play. Many receptionists see the job as a vocation, much like vets and vet nurses/technicians, and as such there is a lot of loyalty which keeps them in the role. However, many do not feel they are recognised or rewarded adequately, and they are often expected to work long hours without the appropriate financial or career reward.

Receptionists are usually the first point of contact with the public and with many practices using locums to cover shifts, it is therefore the receptionist who is often seen as the one constant presence and the ‘face of the practice’. One phone call or email handled well at reception could equate to an estimated £8,000 (Client Lifetime Value) to the practice.

In addition, with the overall pressures on all the practice staff, the reception team support the efficient running of the practice and increase the well-being and retention of all staff and the overall success of the business in an increasingly more fractious environment for many staff with many clients struggling with the cost of living.

In our last comprehensive BVRA members survey in 2024, there were some clear messages coming through including:

- More respect and appreciation of the complexity of the receptionist's role
- Better pay and conditions to reflect with comparative roles and acknowledge staff experience and skills
- More time for CPD and appreciation of the benefits for employers as well as staff
- Better communications within practice and especially where there is an external head office
- More support when dealing with difficult clients

These are loyal and key members of staff and there is a good business case for supporting them further and significant competitive advantages to be gained by the employers that recognise this and support staff training and reward staff based on their skill, commitment and passion for the role they play. In some instances, this is certainly starting to be recognised. This will in turn benefit all stakeholders and especially the clients and their animals.

BVRA remains committed to supporting receptionist including with more training support and relevant qualifications and the development of the AVR status. We will continue to advocate for the role, working closely with other organisations such as the BVA & VMG.

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