

Response to your Veterinary services enquiry which I doubt you will read as you have not answered any of my comments over the last two years.

I will comment on your document as I go starting with your message from Mr Coleman

Firstly there are reams of scientific data that point to having pets (a word I object to) is far more than Mr Colemans comments As he rightly pointed out over half of UK households have pets but they are far more than his intimations. They keep us healthy both mentally and physically and to many of us are a major part of our lives, particularly for people who live alone which is an increasing number of people.

It is a shame that vets and vet nurses are facing abuse, but it is not surprising when the chances are that owners bringing their pets in when they are sick are under stress before they walk through the door. Certainly in many cases it is not so much about the costs although they are completely out of control thanks to the lack of control on the six major companies owning them. It is the appalling service we are given with a sick animal particularly out of hours service and the immediate ask for money as you walk through the door.

Having employed 12 people to run my birds of prey centre and having between 22000 and 45000 visitors per year, if I caught any of them treating the visitors the way I have been treated, I would have sacked them. Certainly there is a need for the receptionist to have some customer care training before we even get to seeing the vets.

His comment that vet business are typically charging double the price of online pharmacies – who incidentally are often owned by the same large companies that own the vet practises – is in my experience not true. At the vets I am charged £88 for 180ml bottle of Meloxicam, online I can buy it for £22, that means that the vets are charging four times as much and the same can be said for many more drugs they offer.

In his comment about helping owner when things go wrong. What should happen here is that the corporations, like independent vets should come under the RCVS' controls, It was they who made the first initial and stupid mistake of opening the door to non-vets to own practices but not putting them under the same restrictions as vet owned practises. So they can get away with literally murder without any recourse to being struck off in worst cases.

In your Introduction you state that you gathered extensive evidence from a range of sources let the group of advisors or experts was made up only of vet and vet nurses who are much more likely to have a bias, you did not have any owners and particularly owners who had experienced poor treatment of their animals and very poor service from LVGs.

One of your notes states that you excluded pet food companies – I presume you did know that some of those companies are owned by the same groups as the LVGs which you do not mention.

On How the Market Works you state that pet owners have started to humanise their animals, well not all us do but we sure as hell expect a better service than we are getting regardless of the over charging and so far I have not seen any mention of quality of service.

If the principal function of a vet is to protect animal welfare then at the outset of training to be a vet that should be part of their training and that may well mean working out of hours. If you don't want to work long hours, then do not train to be a vet. Farmers work out of hours, anyone with wildlife work out of hours, horse owners work out of hours, anyone who cares for the animals they are owning or looking

after works out of hours. We expect to and do not expect to have a five day working week, if we did we would not keep animals.

Protecting animal Welfare

I am not sure it is advisable to use the NHS as any comparison as older people like me pray we will not get ill with the appalling service we get as humans.

The LVG's do not seek a reasonable profit, they do not invest in the equipment they should have, they do not provide the cover they should provide, and they are generally only in it for the profit, they have no genuine interest in animal welfare.

When one of my dogs became ill and collapsed on a Sunday we were sent 30 miles to the out of hours practise, I was told on the phone that the consultation would be £320. There were five other emergencies there. I am sure you can do the maths. There was one vet only to deal with six emergencies and at that price you can be assured that they were emergencies. I asked the receptionist if that number of emergencies was normal and she said yes at weekends and bank holidays. Anyone with animal welfare at heart would have had the brains to have two vets on for weekends and bank holidays. We had to collect our animals at 7.30 the following morning. I was told that although they had tried to scan my dog their scanner was not working (!). The bill was over £900 for one night in, treatment with buscopan which I can buy at the chemist for pennies, IV fluids and a nonfunctioning scanner. I was told to take my dog straight back to my normal vets where she was put back on IV fluids, I collected her that night as I refused to drive back to the out of hours vet and would have kept her on fluids at home. I had to take her back the following morning – more IV Fluids and guess what their scanner was not working properly (great investment for our pets welfare from the VLGs!). That bill was £1563.15 The advised me to take she to another vet who had a better scanner as they were worried about her heart. That bill was a further £904, making to total bill for a severe tummy bug to £3367. However it is not the cost, although that is far too high, it is the appalling treatment a very sick dog got from the various vets I had to take her to.

In the measures below:

Helping.pet.owners.when.things.go.wrong.by.requiring.all.veterinary
businesses.to.have.the.right.systems.in.place.for.when.people.need.to
complain.and.sharing.data.with.the.regulator.about.complaints?to.build.best
practice;

Are you going to make the corporates have the same rules as vets do – i.e. they can be penalised by the RCVS's for wrong doing and worst case struck off – this must happen or you will have as there is now – no control over LVGs

Ensuring.out_of_hours.services.are.responsive.by.making.it.easier.for
veterinary.practices.to.terminate.out_of_hours.contracts.where.they.believe
there.is.a.better.alternative.for.their.customers;

Are you going to insist that there are enough vets working at a practise to deal with 6 emergencies that happen regularly at weekends and bank holidays, rather than one over worked and stressed vet dealing with 6 sick animals and six or more very stressed owners who are expecting decent service.

You talk about being supported by the RCVS I have to say I think an investigation should be done on them to see why they opened the door to corporates. [REDACTED]

In your introduction you state that it is important that people pay a fair price when visiting the vet – which is not the case now, but it is also vitally important that they are their pets get the right treatment and service which in my experience is not happening.

You or probably some vets state that humanisation of pet mean that many pet owners are demanding more in their requirements. It would be interested to know the percentage of people who expect that. I as the owner of dogs and a horse expect good service and treatment for my animals I do not expect miracles.

Owners.expect.the.veterinary.businesses".commercial.activities.to.be.exercised.in.a.professional.ethical.context; – I would be very interested to what the ethics of the LVGs are, because I have not seen much in the way of ethics at this point.

If this group of experts looking at all these problems do not know that the corporates owning the vet groups also own the companies providing the cheaper costing drugs online, also own the crematoriums which the LVGs tell their staff to use if the customer wants their dead animal cremated and that does not count the fact that own the pet food companies as well – the whole things shows a huge lack of the wider scope of this significant problem.

The, sometimes huge, companies owning the vets are not investing in new up to date equipment or even making sure that the existing equipment is working properly, nor are they investing in staff. They have got rid of trained vet nurses and replaced them with cheaper less trained staff. They are not offering enough wages for those coming into the profession. All.this.you.have.stated.in.your.document.that.they.have.not.provided.evidence.of.investment.in.the.practised.they.have.acquired;

Sadly the sometimes less ethical independent vets are likely to follow suit on the pricing of their services which is a shame but may be that it is so had to employ decent vets who are prepared to work longer hours than a nine to five job.

Your statement on regulation needs to be far stronger. The corporations should have the same restrictions as the Privately owned vet practises, and those restrictions should be on the company not their employees, as in any large business. The RCVS's has badly let down vets, pet owners and pets. They are not doing their job and should be ashamed of themselves.

In your summary of provisional concerns you need to add a four point and that is that the service given by the LVG's needs to be dramatically improved and monitored long term to make sure they are following the welfare needs of the animals and their owners.

Point. 24. Third?we.propose.to.make.recommendations.to.government.that.it.acts.to
replace.the.ineffective.and.outdated.regulatory.framework.with.an.effective.and
proportionate.and.legally.required.one;

If you are going to implement regular surveys which is a good idea, please make sure that these surveys are well advertised as I missed the first one not knowing it was happening. In fact I have no idea where one would have looked.

Owners should be informed that the drugs they buy on line are owned by the corporations owning the vet practices, that the drugs they buy from their vets may be ones that the owning company makes and obliges the vets to use, and that the crematoriums are probably owned by the same corporation.

Point 83, not only should you force a standard price for prescriptions, but you should also enforce the number of times it can be used for drugs that are bought on a regular basis. One vet group I used the prescription only lasted for three times and another for six times. The prescription is also not easy for the owners to understand which may of course be on purpose.

To finish I would like to add that I have had 19 labradors since 1978, so I have much experience with vets and I am very sad that the poor service I received from the vets that I have been with for probably 10 years which then was sold to a corporation. The out of hours service is the worst problem, I think. If the practice knew that it was normal to have this many emergencies at weekends on earth did the place not have two vets on.

The other point I would like to make is that I also have a horse who came down with colic recently. You may or may not know that this can be life threatening. She was in the equine hospital for four days with 24 hour service and care. IV fluids and various other treatment – total bill £2000 as opposed to over £3000 for my dog, excellent service and enough vets that they were not as stressed as the owners!