

## Opening Statement

Dear Committee members, Doctors, members of the government and opposition, joining today's hearing.

My name is Mudher Al-Rahmani, I have been working in the vet industry since Jan/2017, holding over 18 years of management skills across different sectors, specifically in the oil and gas industry internationally.

I am delighted to be invited here today to share my views and experience not from a perspective of being a vet, but from a perspective of being a business manager and business owner.

When I joined the industry, I started in a company comprised of 3 veterinary practices, managing a team of 9 vets.

Each clinic consists of a minimum 7-8 staff members between vets, nurses, management, and vet nursing students under training. Working hours was from 8:30am to 8:00pm

6 years later, as of today the 29<sup>th</sup> of Aug 2023, we have only 1 vet at each clinic, and working hours are dropped from 8:30am to 5:00pm only.

However, our client database increased by minimum %40 and this was associated with an increased number of medical cases, routine vaccinations, and surgeries.

As you can see, we've had a massive shortage in staff, despite our best abilities to make them comfortable and happy and I am pretty sure this is a main reason why we are all here today.

NOW,

Do **we** blame those vets for leaving us, or for chasing a better dream, or chasing a higher income, or easier job, or fancy clinic! No, we can't. This is since there is a huge mental health aspect behind why vets are either leaving to seek a more lifestyle approach to their career (**a shortage in vets and an increase in pets and livestock, more animals being sick, is not really a good mix**) or they just leave the industry all together.

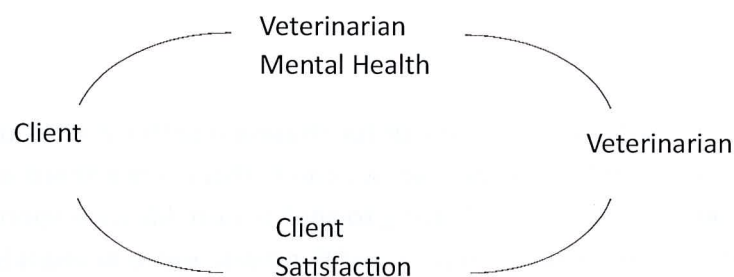
So as business owners we've had to make sure our vets stay, and that's involved us increasing their wages at the expense of their ability to generate income and therefore this cost as relayed back on to the clients.

The challenges we face as a business, and we continue to face for the last few years can be categorized and summarized in two parts as follow:

### Business

So, as I mentioned before, the lack of vets in the industry has led to a major impact towards the mental health of current veterinarians. This has unfortunately led to major issues within the business, such as:

- Veterinarians are exposed to emotional rollercoasters daily which has led to them leaving the industry, this has in turn led businesses to **increase wages of those available by minimum %50**. - A recent study published by Hagen et al in 2020, stated that 43.7% of vets are most likely to leave work due to work life balance and the physical/emotional impacts of the job.
- Current veterinarians are being overwhelmed by the case load; this has directly affected businesses as they are leaning towards taking in less cases which has resulted in **less revenue generated**. Unfortunately, due to the nature of the cause, we are now seeing more vets being complacent resorting to taking on **more simpler services** rather than challenging themselves to do so. In 2022, the attributable cost of burnout of veterinarians to the US industry is between 1 and 2 billion dollars lost in revenue due to turnover and reduced working hours.
  - I believe this must be really upsetting for them as vets spend over 5 years of training where they all are ambitious to learn, however the effects of mental health have led to them being more guarded.
- From a personal point of view, general business policies and protocols are no longer effective. Due to the current case load, veterinarians are finding it harder to adhere to nationwide business standards which has directly impacted the potential revenue that could be made. For example, veterinarians are generally taught to carry out consults within 30 minutes in a fast-paced general practice environment. But because of veterinarians guarding their mental health, they are generally spending more time in consult leading to loss of revenue overall. We as business owners are being forced to accept this loss because of the shortage of vets and in fear of losing their current staff.



- Client satisfaction/ retention has been a major issue for veterinary business owners, as you all may know, no clients mean no generating income and business is no longer called business.
  - A major consequence of vet shortages has been retaining clients and ensuring that they receive a satisfying experience. However, current veterinarians are struggling to uphold this responsibility, due to the lack of support leading to adverse mental health concerns. So, based on the above diagram we can see an association between veterinary mental health and client satisfaction.
    - When veterinarians experience adverse impact of mental health because of the overwhelming case load and lack of support due to the

veterinary shortage. We can see that clients are more expected to have unsatisfying experiences.

- This common phenomenon was highly prevalent in a study recording perceived effects of veterinarians' mental health on provision of care. Researchers from Canada showed that this is a strong association of having negative impacts amongst co-workers, clients, reduced concentrations, difficulty of making decisions and reduced quality of care when veterinarians have poor mental health.

In addition, there are industry challenges:

- Limited capacity of national students' intake
  - International students' intake is higher than national students, over 80% of international students go back to their home countries after graduation.
- Long and painful process of overseas vets to pass.
- As you may all know, the veterinary medicine program is not so much like the medicine program. Students are only exposed to only 1 year of rotations where they can really apply their knowledge to a more practical sense, in comparison to medicine where they complete a 3-4 year residency program with government hospitals ensuring that they are confident enough before they go out to the workforce.
  - I understand that this is a major cost for veterinary schools to consider but due to the lack of veterinary shortages, new graduates find themselves being put in the deep end in the first 2 years of practice making it a very daunting experience. For small business owners like me, we may find it difficult to accommodate for the lack of confidence whilst balancing the client/case demand.
- Local veterinary clinics are finding it hard to compete with corporation/specialist centres when it comes to offering competitive salaries for vets. The lack of veterinarians in the industry has made it very difficult for small business owners like me to compete and retain vets financially.
  - In addition to this, as a result of the adverse effects of mental health, we are now seeing a vast majority of graduated vets or current vets preferring to work on locum shifts for higher pay and to better suit their lifestyle.

With all the list earlier, we recommend the following:

- Enhance the engagement of law makers to address all challenges we are facing currently.
- The government should allocate more funds to universities to host more domestic students as an incentive to accept more students from Australia rather than international students.
  - If this is an unfair point, the government should enforce international students to part take in 2-3 years of employment post-graduation. As this a

common requirement that international medicine students already take part in. Essentially medicine students are asked to undertake their residency program in Australia post-graduation before they can go overseas and work. This helps the human health sector as more people are employed to support. This should be reciprocated in the veterinary industry.

- Ease the accreditation process of overseas vets', by either increasing the number of tests during the year or create a quicker pathway to achieve the Australian accreditation.

Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to express my feelings on subject matter, hoping by the end of this committee, real solutions will be put in place.

Kind Regards

Mudher Al-rahmani