

Submission
No 99

**INQUIRY INTO VETERINARY WORKFORCE SHORTAGE
IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 18 July 2023

Partially
Confidential

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the NSW Government regarding the Veterinary Workforce and the shortage of staff.

BACKGROUND

I have been in small animal practice for over 40 years. During this time there have been many significant changes that have affected the profession in one way or another.

The improvements in technology have been huge, and contributed in a very positive way to animal welfare and care.

The growth in specialist practice and 24 hour emergency services in the capital centres and larger cities have been of enormous benefit.

Pet ownership has grown significantly, as people realise the benefits and value of pets to their wellbeing.

Pet insurance has supported the increased level of service and care that is available for small animals.

With the growth of Dr Google, clients are far better educated and have greater expectations when they seek veterinary services.

STAFF SHORTAGES

In recent times it has become increasingly difficult to attract and employ both veterinarians and nurses. In some instances it can take some 6 to 12 months to fill a position. Some of the possible causes of this include:

1. Insufficient Vets and Nurses being available
2. More Vets wishing to work part time.
3. Many Vets do not want to work weekends, or late in the evenings.
4. Remuneration
5. Career opportunities
6. Have left the profession and changed careers.

REMUNERATION

The pay rates for Vets and Nurses in practice are lower than they can earn in other professions, or elsewhere. Many people move into other areas of employment where they are paid significantly more money, with less stress and a better lifestyle.

The current business model in practice restricts the pay that can be offered.

RETENTION

Sadly there are many Vets and Nurses who are highly skilled, choose to leave the profession after 3-5 years and they are lost forever.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES.

Traditionally Veterinary graduates would enter general practice and remain there for many years.

In recent years there have been many graduates who have moved from general practice to take up internships, residencies, specialist training, teaching or research.

MENTAL HEALTH.

This is becoming an increasing problem in veterinary practice. Sadly there are instances where suicides occur, and often related to the workplace, abusive clients, drug and alcohol abuse, financial or relationships.

In many cases the person has been subjected to serious abuse by aggressive clients.

Some Veterinarians struggle with the interactions with clients in the consulting room, or on the phone. The clients are often very emotional and demanding, which can lead to serious anxiety or difficulty communicating with clients.

Some Vets have trained and joined the profession for the pleasure of working with animals. But it also comes with the need to be able to interact and communicate with clients, and the team of staff.

CLIENT DEMANDS AND EXPECTATIONS

In recent years clients have become more demanding and have higher expectations, particularly as they have become better educated about services that Vets can offer.

Many clients now live in very stressful and anxious times, and rely on their pets for comfort and support.

With this comes more pressure and responsibility on the Vets and Nurses.

SKILLS REQUIRED IN PRACTICE

The recent Veterinary graduates are highly skilled in the technical and scientific aspects of animal care. But not all of them have the skills required to enter Veterinary practice, and interact with clients and staff members. If they find it difficult to relate to people they will most likely find practice difficult, stressful and unrewarding. The Veterinary Schools have worked on this aspect of the training, but there is a need for a lot more to be done so they are better equipped.

The new graduates do not seem to be as well trained or willing to perform surgery, as used to be the case. It is a very important aspect of general practice.

Efficient use of time will reduce stress and anxiety, but many recent graduates find it difficult to handle many things at once in an efficient way.

An increasing number of pets are referred for investigation, workup or treatment, when these procedures could have been done very well in the practice. Some Veterinarians lack the confidence to work through the cases, and manage them appropriately, with the client being very grateful. The key is to establish which patients require referral.

THE FUTURE.

Veterinary practice is a great honour and pleasure, with huge responsibilities.

There are many changes and pressures on it currently.

The Australian Veterinary Association, the Veterinary Practitioners Board of NSW, Veterinarians, Nurses, Practice owners, Corporates, and many other interested parties have been working very hard on the issues to identify them and offer solutions. They are to be commended for this.

WHERE TO NEXT

1. Is it time to change to model of Veterinary Practice and completely review the structures and systems in this new world?
2. Consider the introduction of a one year Internship in general practice, prior to giving full registration. This would be along the lines of doctors, pharmacists, lawyers and accountants. The new graduates would be given the opportunity to work in general practice, and gain the skills required to really embrace and enjoy it.