

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

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 20 July 2023

Partially
Confidential

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing as an equine veterinarian who graduated from university two years ago. I love being a veterinarian, and I chose this career because I believe that I can, as a veterinarian, have a positive impact on both the lives of animals and their owners.

I feel very privileged to have the opportunity to contribute to and improve the health and wellbeing of animals. Additionally, I am grateful to be able to support animal owners through taking care of their beloved animals in times of ill health, and providing them with the knowledge and skills to best care for their animals.

However, I feel that there are some significant challenges facing our profession which I fear may impact upon the ability of veterinarians now and in future to carry out our very important roles. Unfortunately, I have already witnessed many of these first-hand.

Public perception and expectations of veterinarians is a significant issue at the present time. The cost of veterinary care, which is often substantial, is in particular a major source of concern for our clients. As we are very fortunate in Australia to have Medicare to assist with our own medical expenses, people often do not see the true costs of their healthcare and therefore expect that the veterinary care of their animals should be minimal also. On a daily basis, clients will convey their displeasure at the cost of the care we are providing for their patients. This is demeaning as a veterinarian, as we have all spent many years studying and all undertake ongoing education in order to have up-to-date knowledge and skills to be able to provide the best possible care for our patients. Improving the public perception of the costs of providing high level healthcare for animals would be beneficial in the development of a better understanding of this matter.

Further, client expectations of veterinarians are rapidly changing and these can place veterinarians under immense pressure. Defamation and inappropriate use of social media are some of the issues veterinarians face resultant of client expectations. Reassessment of regulatory frameworks in order to address this and better protect veterinarians would be of benefit in order to reduce these challenges facing us.

The regulation of drugs, particularly sedatives, is an ongoing issue in the veterinary profession. For example, at the current time, there is consideration being given to whether equine dentists should be permitted to use sedatives to conduct their procedures. In my opinion, and in the opinion of many other veterinarians, this is not only dangerous but also degrading to our profession. Equine dentists do not have the extensive training of a veterinarian to allow them to make an educated decision as to the appropriateness and safety of sedation in an animal – therefore the welfare of the animal may be compromised.

The huge commitment of working hours of veterinarians is another significant issue causing burnout and departure of veterinarians from the profession. The common expectation that veterinarians will regularly work a significant number of hours outside of those expected in other professions, often for little to no remuneration, contributes to exhaustion and poor mental wellbeing. Long working hours can negatively impact on family life for veterinarians, therefore leading to issues at home and deterioration of mental health. Tighter regulation of working hours of veterinarians would greatly improve the longevity of veterinarians. Additionally, regulation of working hours would undoubtedly result in improved mental and physical health in veterinarians and therefore ultimately contribute to the provision of the best possible care of patients.

Remuneration is also a major concern to the veterinary profession. Low wages combined with significant study debts are contributing to veterinarians leaving the industry in favour of other areas of work with more favourable remuneration. Providing educational fee relief would be of benefit in relieving some of the financial burden on veterinarians at the present time. Additionally, regulation of remuneration to ensure veterinarians are being fairly compensated for their level of experience, knowledge, and skills would be valuable.

In conclusion, there are many areas requiring addressing in order to facilitate the sustainability of our very valuable profession. If changes are not made, and in the very foreseeable future, significant consequences may ensue.