

## **RMB Newsletter Prescription for a healthy veterinary profession November 2003**

Dear Reader,

The British Government is changing the rules for British vets (see ABC).

Under the current Veterinary Surgeons Act vets occupy 90% of the seats on the governing Council of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons — and as the saying goes: ‘Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.’

Now the British Government is proposing that, under the new rules, vets should control 60% of the seats. But of course that would still give vets a permanent hold on power. Is it likely that they would behave any less corruptly?

Some excellent submissions have been sent in to Mr Paul McDonald, the government officer coordinating the review of the Act. (See below.)

Recently I spoke with Mr McDonald who remarked that he had received ‘loads of emails’ from several countries and thanked us for bringing the pet food problem to his attention. It’s a global problem; vets are ‘living a lie’ the world over. (Some animal ‘welfare’ organisations are also in the pocket of the pet food manufacturers.) But it is the British Government that is currently reviewing the rules — and therefore has the responsibility to ensure any new arrangements adequately deal with current and foreseeable problems.

Mr McDonald remarked that, whilst we had drawn attention to the problems, we had not recommended specific changes that we believe are necessary for the proper functioning of the veterinary profession.

If vets have complete control then the results are ruinous. They promote their own immediate self interest — whilst pretending otherwise.

If the Government appoints a regulator then once again all power will reside with the regulator.

As imperfect as democratic arrangements may be, I suggest that the new regulatory committee overseeing the UK vets should have a limit of 50% veterinary representation. (Even 40% representation by vets would be OK.)

Under this model a sense of partnership between vets and the government and community representatives would be more likely to prevail — a realisation that their job is to serve the community not the self-interest of the vets and their pet food industry backers.

It seems to me that if the British Government gets this part right the other fine details won't matter so much. The future will be able to take care of itself. (There will likely be flow-on benefits for other countries too.)

Below I've formulated an email that you might like to copy and send to Mr McDonald. Otherwise writing your own email would possibly carry greater 'weight'. Please sign your email and indicate to Mr McDonald where you live and why you are qualified to comment.

We have until the 17 December to get LOTS OF submissions to Mr McDonald.

Best wishes,

Tom Lonsdale

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PLEASE CUT, PASTE AND SEND EMAIL (AMMENDED AS YOU REQUIRE)  
TO MR PAUL McDONALD  
PLEASE SEND COPY TO T LONSDALE FOR ARCHIVE AND POSSIBLE  
FUTURE PUBLICATION – THANK YOU

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To: [Paul.A.McDonald@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Paul.A.McDonald@defra.gsi.gov.uk)

Subject: Recommendation for an improved Veterinary Surgeons Act

Cc: [tom@rawmeatybones.com](mailto:tom@rawmeatybones.com)

Dear Mr McDonald,

The current Veterinary Surgeons Act vests 90% control of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) in the hands of veterinary surgeons.

The current proposal to reduce veterinary representation to 60% may appear to increase accountability. However, in my view this arrangement would still vest total control in the hands of veterinary surgeons.

Lord Acton remarked: 'Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.'

The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons' refusal to contemplate an investigation and resolution of the pet food scandal is a prime example of power corrupting absolutely.

I suggest that power within the veterinary regulatory framework needs to be shared.

Please ensure that the new Veterinary Surgeons Act limits veterinary membership of the Council of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons to a maximum 50%.

In respect to the balance of the RCVS Council safeguards will need to be put in place.

I believe that manufacturers, manufacturers' organisations and 'front organisations' should be excluded from sitting on the RCVS Council.

Animal Welfare and other organisations should be required to publish their funding structure. A limit should be set, say 10%, for funding received from any one company or 20% from any one industry.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

NAME, ADDRESS, QUALIFICATIONS/EXPERIENCE

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3 Letters previously submitted to the Veterinary Surgeons Act Review Team  
Dear Mr McDonald,

The following are my comments on the proposals for modernisation of the Veterinary Surgeons Act (the "Act").

In your preamble you state that The Act provides "for regulating their professional education and professional conduct"

My concern is primarily with the corrupting nexus between pet food manufacturers and veterinarians' professional education and ethical guidance by their professional associations.

In the 35 years since you last examined The Act, the field of pet nutrition has become almost monopolised by pet food manufacturers. These manufacturers, acting in the same way as all large commercial entities in the new capitalism, are not selling an ethical product. Rather they are more concerned with the retailing of a label to as wide a market as they can create. Their ethics are not controlled in any way by any external regulator in any part of the world and yet the veterinary profession has come to be as closely identified with processed cat and dog feed as it is with any ethically developed pharmaceutical.

I am in no doubt that the pet food companies have managed the selective release and suppression of their extensive findings on cat and dog nutrition so as to maximise their profit without regard for the welfare of the cats and dogs which consume their products. I believe this has been managed by a combination of judicious propagation of nutrition myths with just enough correct information as will ensure continued "pushing" of their products by veterinarians.

The deleterious effects of consumption of processed pet foods are recognised and too many to detail here.

They begin with an animal's dentition and cascade through digestive systems which are unsuited to dealing with carbohydrate-laden intake.

They include production of excreta which adds both in bulk and hazard to the load on the urban environment.

They include disease and consequent distress of a myriad poorly managed outcomes.

They also include temperament and stress outcomes from as serious as dog bite to as pathetic as self mutilation.

I am unqualified to even guess at the size of financial burdens on pet owners but I am sure such burdens are among the effects of processed pet food.

The widespread suffering here in Australia from the Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease epidemic in cats caused by exclusive consumption of dried pellets is alone enough reason for the pet food manufacturers to either be cut off from their cosy access to the confidence which veterinarians have from their customers or to at least be brought to account in the same ethical way as any pharmaceutical manufacturer whose product a veterinarian prescribes.

Since I doubt any government would choose to allocate already stretched revenue to the establishment of a regulatory system over cat and dog food manufacture - if indeed it had the resources to match a company the size and reach of the Mars Corporation in such a loser's game - I urge you to write into the Act the necessity for true arms-length relationships between professional veterinary bodies and pet food manufacturers and to place the relationships between the profession and those manufacturers in the same category as the relationships with pharmaceutical manufacturers.

It is easy to see that the aims of veterinarians - to heal animals and to do no harm - are at variance with manufacturers whose aims are to increase their market (and profit) above everything.

Pet food manufacturers in seeking wider markets, promote the desirability of pet ownership (mostly, I note, the kind of pet for which they manufacture a product) are further addicting the small animal veterinarian today to the over-supply of animals as well as the manufacturers' products. So much so that attempts by responsible pet owners and welfare organisations to limit the casual abandoning or ill treatment of pets has not even put a dent in the numbers of healthy young animals euthanased each year.

How can veterinarians be objective about a problem that they are complicit in promoting and supporting?

Clearly, you will need to examine the Act's requirements for how veterinarians receive their professional education with particular reference to nutrition training.

At the same time I once again urge you to examine the nexus between veterinarians' professional associations and pet food manufacturers with the aim of separating veterinary ethics from pet food manufacturers marketing plans.

I have no doubt that there is already impetus for such action in other countries.

I hope you give full consideration to my comments above, which have been hard won over around ten years of first-hand experience of many of the ill

effects of processed animal foods.

I am not a veterinarian. I do not have any interest in commercial supply of any animal feed. I do not breed or care for any animals except my home companions.

I shall be pleased to supply more information if you need it.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours faithfully,  
Nancy McIntyre  
Resident in Harvey, Western Australia  
Address willingly supplied if requested

Dear Mr McDonald,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on proposals for modernisation of the UK's Veterinary Surgeons Act.

I am in full agreement with Dr Tom Lonsdale that this review of the Act provides an excellent opportunity to examine the ties between the veterinary profession and the multinational companies who produce artificial diets which result in a chain of disastrous system failures for pets.

The review also presents an opportunity to examine the commercial ties between the veterinary profession and pharmaceutical companies. Unnecessary over-vaccination of pets is creating many problems for their immune systems.

Having been involved in breeding and showing purebred dogs here in Australia over three decades, I've had ample opportunity to observe the adverse impact of inappropriate nutrition and unnecessary drugs.

In my view the aforementioned alliances are little short of criminal in their effects.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Judy McMahan

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**Liz Hannel, RMN, RGN  
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Tel 01706 846040/880209**

Dear Mr McDonald

I am writing in response to information I recently came across regarding the reform proposals for the veterinary Surgeons Act.

As a pet owner all my life, I have become increasingly concerned at the deterioration (as opposed to the improvement) in animal health over the last 10 years. Much of this I lay at the doors of the Vets themselves and the pet food industry.

My reasoning goes thus: If you give any living creature an inappropriate diet then you will naturally affect its' health and render it more susceptible to all forms of disease, acute and chronic. It is like trying to run a Rolls Royce car on 2-stroke fuel, it can't be done.

The 2-stroke fuel in this case is the junk food that is assertively promoted in all our information media – television and press, etc. Proprietary animal foods, packaged for our “convenience”, in both dry and wet forms are full of unnecessary ingredients that no animal in its right mind or natural state would choose to eat. These foods certainly contribute to dental problems, digestive and skin problems, and the toxic loads they create predispose to more lethal disease affecting kidneys, liver – and promoting malignancy and behavioural problems – these all have a dreadful effect on owners, emotionally – and financially. So-called science diets are formulated to make a profit and get repeat sales, to fill the animal up and not much else. Many proprietary foods are full of substances such as aromatics, as in their “raw” state they would not be attractive food choices for the animals.

We have forgotten how to cope without great bags of dried food, or cans of pappy wet foods. Most owners are horrified when told their animal's diet has contributed to its health problems. None of us would knowingly feed toxic rubbish to our pets, but many owners don't know what else to do. This mis-information is perpetuated by the Veterinary profession, promoting products only available through their practices, pooh-poohing other nutritional ideas, and further de-skilling owners. It creates a dependency culture, which given the profit bias of these practices – they are businesses first and foremost, is more than a little suspect. It actually becomes more of a fraud.

Sick animals are clearly what veterinary surgeons trained to deal with – but what if their practices are actually creating health problems? If this were to happen in human medicine there would be a huge outcry. Fraudulent medicine is hunted out and ruthlessly put down, and quite rightly. But who speaks for animals? The veterinary and pet food manufacturers. But there are just so many vested interests in these two groups are they truly to be trusted? I ma afraid that I don't think so any more.

I would also draw your attention to some other practises that I am concerned may not be in the best interests of our companion animals. Over-medication is every bit as great a problem in veterinary medicine as it is in human medicine. The rise in the use of steroidal and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory has been enormous, and antibiotic prescriptions have also risen.

One medication is accepted almost without question. Annual vaccination of cats and dogs is routine, it is drummed into us. However, there is now an increasing body of evidence both here in the UK, and overseas, to suggest that this protocol is implicated in the rise of chronic disease, including cancers. Some Vets are now of the opinion that vaccination may not be required more frequently than at 3-4 year intervals, and that titre levels can be checked in-between. However, there is clearly a conflict of interest here too. Vets, as already indicated are in business and need to make a profit. Vaccinations represent a substantial profit – the mark up on them is phenomenal. The pharmaceutical industry that supplies Vets is reluctant to see a reduction in the frequency of administration – they clearly want the repeat sales, and Vets are not going to promote a drop in their income.

One vet in the Midlands who charged an appropriate (lower) fee for immunisation was hounded by her professional body, to force her to comply with the rest of the profession as it was clear she was showing them up. Does this not smack of restrictive practices? Is this a body we can trust to represent our best interests when they behave in this fashion?

It is extremely difficult to make a complaint about an individual Vet. The RCVS are not user friendly. They are also slow to respond. They have very restrictive methods of reporting, and they also restrict the sort of complaints that they are prepared to consider – this I know from personal experience. I would like to see much more openness and transparency in this particular respect.

I am “just” a pet owner – I come from a nursing background, so I am well placed to be able to make some assessment of the care that my animals receive. Because I want the best for my animals I am prepared, and educated enough, to be able to do my own research, to ask questions – and sort out the mis-information from the good stuff. I have struggled to find a Vet that I can have a dialogue with, rather than be patronised and patted on the head like my dogs. This profession needs to be dragged into the modern world, rather than continuing to operate in a fashion that was more acceptable some 50 years ago. This is a generalisation, and I have to say I have encountered pockets of fabulous practice too – but it is unusual.

Yours faithfully

Liz Hannel

