

BVA Congress 2008 – Annual General Meeting
Sunday, 28 September 2008
Royal College of Physicians, London, UK

BVA PRESIDENT NICKY PAULL'S INAUGURAL PRESIDENT'S SPEECH

I am not sure if it is acceptable to start a Presidential year with a list of regrets but I can think of three. Firstly I am sad to see Peter Jinman leaving Council. As Nick has already said he has been a fantastic servant to BVA and Council will miss his wise words and his cravats (although happily not lost altogether as he remains within his role as EWG chairman). Secondly I am really going to miss David Catlow's presence on the Officer team. His sharp brain sees straight to the point and he is a master at keeping my tendency in check by glancing at his watch if I am going on too long. Perhaps I should not have told you that piece of information or you will all be doing it. We will miss you David but we may have more sandwiches to go round. Mind you I am a bit worried as Bill looks as though he might take a bit of filling in the food department. And my last regret is to see Nick stand down as President. He has done a fantastic job over the last 12 months. I have watched him give his all to BVA – his desire to see BVA grow and flourish is written loud and clear on his sleeve. Nick thank you on behalf of BVA for all you have done - you are going to be a tough act to follow.

The challenges ahead appear daunting but I guess no one would take this job on and expect it to be easy. And that is how I see it – a job – not an honour – the honour will be at the end of my tenure if the profession can look back and see I have done a good job. Certainly one thing I have learnt over the last 12 months though as President-elect and that is that all the Officer posts – and that includes the President – are simply part of one big team. And the BVA team is not just the Officers - its the staff and the Board, the standing committees, Council and also the divisions. And working with all these people gives the President a huge knowledge base to draw from. So just a small cog in a wheel – OK a cog in the spotlight but never the less one that cannot do this job alone.

One of the biggest challenges BVA has is to engage fully with all our members – and not just members but with the whole profession. And this will be the theme of my Presidency - communication and engagement with the profession in the whole of the UK.

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NICKY PAULL'S INAUGURAL PRESIDENT'S SPEECH BVA CONGRESS, 28 SEPTEMBER 2008

In many circles outside the profession an opinion given from BVA is often taken to be an opinion from the whole veterinary profession. It is easy to get caught in a circle where members feel you could do so much more. Yet attracting new members and increasing membership income enables finances for more staff time and better services to members and better lobbying. Much of what BVA does is done for all veterinary surgeons not just members so you can argue that a percentage of vets are getting BVA support for nothing – how much more could be done if a higher percentage of vets belonged to BVA.

So BVA has to look to increasing membership – by providing services and support that members want and by providing the political lobbying that the profession needs. But also engaging with all vets and convincing them that the BVA does have an important role to play on their behalf and BVA needs their financial support to do so.

So what should I be expecting over the next year?

We will have the review of the current Pets travel derogation which needs lobbying both in the UK and Europe and for this we must include the potential implications to humans if tick and tapeworm treatments are no longer required. We must engage with the medics if we are to convince others of the need to prevent importing zoonotic diseases into the UK attached to our pets.

And for those of you who watched the BBC programme recently on dog breeding and have followed the early fall out in the press, you will be aware that the genetics of pedigree dog breeding is going to become a very hot topic for discussion and BVA is already engaged in that debate.

Earlier this year the BVA/RCVS relationship came under the spotlight during the Veterinary Surgeons Act EFRA select committee inquiry in the House of Commons. There will be no new VSA for now but that does not mean we sit back on our haunches and see what happens. The BVA and its divisions need to work with the RCVS and with Defra to attempt to get some resolution of any difficulties of working under the current Act. BVA is also involved with the RCVS in looking at issues regarding the provision of a 24 hour service whilst keeping with in the WTR laws and the PSS review and the associated changes relating to the VMDs requirement for inspection of the medicine supply in all practices. All these issues could have a very profound change on the way many people work in practice and the future of the veterinary profession.

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Internally the Council Review group is in its early stages of deliberation but already it is obvious that whatever is decided it will have an effect on how BVA HQ and the BVA member communicate and how each individual member is represented. The Articles of Association clearly state that Council's role is "that of the representative body of the Members and to represent the Members' views on matters of veterinary policy". We have to make that work.

The BVA staff have put a huge amount of effort this year into getting the new website up and running which will vastly improve BVA's communication with members. Added to that VETS.TV is a new forum for BVA to work in. The Young Vet Network is growing and the graduate support meetings continue in many territorial divisions. But both of these will require ongoing committed individuals input to keep them vibrant. You only have to spend an hour though with a group of veterinary undergraduates or a bunch of recently qualified vets to remember why you became a vet and what it all meant right at the start. We have some amazing young people coming into the profession and we should be doing all we can to make sure they want to stay!

Added to all this there are the ongoing animal health and welfare issues – as yet no codes despite the new act. There are also the continuing concerns over the control of endemic and new emerging diseases in the UK – not just in food animals but equines and companion animals as well. (and if one more person says it will be African Horse Sickness this year Nicky!) And this year particularly we are rapidly learning the potential difficulties on this small island of dealing with one disease three different ways – BVA must work with all the devolved governments to promote good science above all else.

To this end BVA needs to have a strong communication with all four CVOs and to work with them to get the veterinary opinion heard at all government levels. There will be times we won't all agree but we should not shirk from putting forward opinions – even if not always well received by government.

And we have to be at the table – if it's to discuss where next with TB, or cost and responsibility sharing or any of the other issues related to food production the veterinary profession needs to be there whether as BVA or a division or both. Just as we do in the pet derogation debate. And through all of this runs the need for BVA and its divisions to work together as one loud clear voice is better heard than a muddled chatter.

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So finally – I better stop now as Mr Catlow is looking at his watch – it must be getting near to lunch. I started with 3 regrets. I will end with 4 concerns:-

One is will I have time to go skiing; the second is will the Cornish Pirates win any matches without me there to shout them on; the third is that my Jack Russell will forget who I am; and the fourth and the biggest concern is that I might be sitting at next year's AGM thinking I could have done better. And that more than anything will drive me to commit here to do everything I can for the British Veterinary Association and our veterinary profession over the next twelve months.