



Professional groups in veterinary medicine: Combating compassion fatigue and burnout

Shana O'Marra, DVM, DACVECC

There is a growing awareness of compassion fatigue and burnout in the field of veterinary medicine a lot of important work is being done. There are now excellent resources to turn to in times of crisis, and many resources available for self-education. This means that someone who is astute enough to recognize that they need to develop new skills has access to many free, online and in-person resources. An individual in crisis has much better resources to turn to than were available just a few years ago, when suicide hotlines may have been your only option.

There has been less focus on what can be done on an institutional or professional group level. The field of veterinary medicine has unique stressors and it makes sense that as a profession, we move beyond the individual level to recognize this shared experience. We have a responsibility to acknowledge and engage with the lived, daily experience of veterinary professionals.

This acknowledgement can be as simple as a check-in with your colleagues, or a more formal debriefing at the end of a difficult case or procedure. Some practices may want to institute a daily debriefing as part of the closing procedures. More formal sit-down support groups can take many forms. Peer-led groups are easy to implement, but can lead to some challenging group dynamics. You may choose to involve a trained group leader to facilitate the group and avoid some potential pitfalls.

One option to tackle a major stressor in veterinary medicine is Balint Group. Balint Groups are a structured group exploration of the patient-provider relationship. Rather than focus on individual feelings, the goal of the group is to engage in an imaginative process that explores the issues that arise in patient-provider relationships. DoveLewis will begin offering a Balint group to veterinarians in the Portland area soon. Interested parties are encouraged to contact us via our feedback form on the DoveLewis.org website.

Selected resources:

- Not One More Vet (NOMV.org, facebook group) - Offers discussion and support as well as a "Bad Day Phone List"
- Vets4Vets (vinfoundation.org/resources/vets4vets/) - Confidential support group for veterinarians
- MightyVet (MightyVet.org) - Online courses and mentorship
- AVMA initiatives (AVMA.org/wellness) - Resources and education
- National hotlines
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-8255 (text chat available)
- Crisis Textline - Text "HOME" to 741741
- PVMA resources (www.portlandvma.org/health-and-wellbeing-resources/)