

British Veterinary Association Day Speech

Dr. Elizabeth Mullineaux, BVA President

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AS DELIVERED

Thank you very much. Thank you, Anna.

Like probably everyone who has stood here before me, I feel a degree of imposter syndrome, anticipation, and also excitement as I take up the role of BVA President. Representing BVA's members, who come from all corners of an increasingly diverse profession, is undoubtedly a challenge, but one I really welcome. I know I will be supported by our committees, working groups, devolved nation Branches and BVA Council, many members of which are in this room and I consider to be friends. I also have the privilege of continuing to work alongside the *amazing* staff at BVA who have made my junior vice-presidential year a great learning experience and really enjoyable. Thanks to all of you.

One of the first things I discovered about being a BVA Officer is just how unpredictable the role can be. Our carefully considered officer portfolios paled into insignificance last September when the CMA launched its review, and the Government announced it was banning XL Bully dogs. Yet despite this unpredictability, the incoming president is asked to choose a presidential theme for the year and after much debate and consideration I've decided on 'a profession that cares'.

Some of you are thinking that's a bit soft for her. For me, this perfectly encapsulates what being a vet is all about. We get up in the middle of the night to calve a cow; support our clients as they say goodbye to their beloved dog; and share the excitement of a family with young children when they bring in their new kitten for the first vaccination. We do all this because we *do really care*. It's therefore incredibly difficult to see our motivations questioned in the way we have seen as a result of the CMA's investigation.

In our interactions with the CMA we're constantly reminding them that the veterinary profession puts the health and welfare of the animals we care for at the centre of everything we do. This is regardless of whether the animals are wild or domesticated, owned or unowned, or an owner's financial position. Any recommendations coming out of the investigation must fully consider animal welfare as well as owner choice and ensuring that is understood by the CMA is a key priority for me in the year ahead.

As a profession that cares, we also care about one another. The media reporting of the CMA investigation has portrayed vets in a way that is at odds with everything I understand and value about the profession, and it has put additional strain on people in practice who already feel overworked and undervalued.

This autumn we're changing the narrative. Building on work we started earlier this year, we're launching a communications campaign that will spotlight the positive work vets do day in, day out. It will remind the public just how much we do care.

I'm a bit of a glass half full person though, and the CMA investigation does present us with opportunities. One of these is an increased chance of securing a new Veterinary Surgeons Act in the next parliament. The 1966 Act is not surprisingly unfit for purpose for a modern profession. It's about as old as I am. New legislation needs to include the regulation of those responsible for the veterinary industry - the businesses and the practises - as well as the professionals working within it. We also hope our colleagues who work alongside us, as part of a multidisciplinary team, will also become properly recognised, particularly important to me, our valued Registered Veterinary Nurses.

In its manifesto, the new Labour government highlighted a number of potential opportunities for the profession and for animal welfare. We will continue to lobby for a solution to the provision of veterinary medicines in Northern Ireland; for the end to puppy smuggling; measures to improve dog breeding and responsible dog ownership; and significant to my own professional interests, a ban of snares in England to align with legislation in Wales and Scotland. We will also press for improved measures to control and eventually eradicate bovine TB across the whole of the UK.

Finally, I'd like to say thank you to a few people. Malcolm and Anna, for everything you have both taught me over the year, it's been invaluable. It's also been really good fun. The three of us are very different personalities, but we've been a really great team and I've loved every minute of it. Rob, welcome to the Officer team. I'm not sure anyone can really replace Malcolm Morley, but I know you'll make a good go of it.

None of us of course get anywhere like this by ourselves. As many of you know, I'm one half of a crazy veterinary couple, and the other half is currently on Shetland scanning sheep. Phil is what keeps me sane most of the time and I couldn't do this role without his support. I'm however really pleased that my sister Kirsten and my brother-in-law Simon could make it today as they are also both a big part of my life and its very special for me to have them here.

And so, there's nothing left to say other than - let's just get on with this.