

## BVA pilot cull support 'not representative'

Dear editor,

The BVA's position of support for the forthcoming pilot culls of badgers in the west of England is, we believe, not representative of majority scientific or veterinary opinion.

As members of the veterinary profession, we are deeply concerned the shooting of free-roaming badgers at night with shotguns and rifles is very likely to have detrimental welfare impacts on a large number of individual badgers that may be shot, maimed and severely injured, but not killed outright. The natural behaviour of those injured badgers will be to retreat underground where they will probably suffer a slow and very unpleasant death.

Defra claims the "humaneness" of this killing method will be assessed. However, without a detailed protocol it is impossible to judge whether the pilot culls are likely to generate scientifically robust data that can be used to form an objective opinion on humaneness. Indeed, it is our concern the badger carcasses being assessed will be unrepresentative because wounded animals experiencing the greatest and most prolonged distress are highly unlikely to be retrieved for examination, and there will be little or no consideration of the distress caused to surviving badgers whose communities have been disrupted.

In such circumstances, it cannot be right for the BVA to declare support for the badger cull.

Formulation of BVA policy rarely involves the canvassing of its full membership, but rather is achieved through consultation with appropriate specialist divisions. However, policy affecting the welfare of large numbers of badgers that will be subject to controversial control methods should not be confined to those vets who have a vested interest in the dairy or beef industries affected by bTB. The public and the Government look to the veterinary profession to provide guidance and leadership on issues concerning animal welfare and the BVA, rightly or wrongly, is regarded by many members of the public and by government as the voice of the veterinary profession. Given the level of public and esteemed scientific concern generated by this issue, it is surely incumbent on the BVA to ensure its policy reflects the uncertainties surrounding the impacts of culling, particularly in respect to the welfare of affected badgers and their communities.

Until more is known about the protocol for assessing "humaneness", the BVA should withdraw its support for the Government's policy forthwith, and, at the very least, canvass its full membership before reconsidering its position.

Yours faithfully,

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## Unbiased research?

Dear editor

Niall Taylor's letter (May 6 issue) raises some interesting points. Unfortunately, his assertion that no positive evidence in favour of homeopathy exists outside of homeopathic journals is incorrect. One possible explanation as to why his doubtless exhaustive research did not reveal any is the word "homeopathy" has, on occasions, been edited out of published papers.

I suggest Mr Taylor has a look at a paper by R E Hallamaa published in *Equine Veterinary Education* (*Equine Vet Educ* [2010] 22[12]: 610-615) on the subject of autoserum preparation in the treatment of equine summer eczema (sweet itch) where 70 per cent of horses benefited from the treatment. The treatment was carried out using a homeopathic preparation.

I was surprised to find out in correspondence with the author (Hallamaa) that she is not a homeopath, but a research biochemist who has conducted similar trials on sarcoid treatment, and whose original paper had references to homeopathy edited out before publication. Now why would that be?

I am always disappointed by the aggressive nature of most of the letters challenging homeopathy. I can only think this aggression is a product of fear, for which there may be a constitutional homeopathic remedy.

Yours faithfully,

**NIGEL DODMAN**, MRCVS,  
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## Supporting colleagues

Dear editor,

Rosie Allister hits the nail on the head when she says the whole industry needs to do more to promote well-being in a positive way (April 29 issue). It's the responsibility of all of our associations and organisations to play a role in promoting positive mental health and the responsibility of us all as individuals to support our colleagues.

Like the RCVS, the BVA supports the work of the VBF, Vetlife and the Vet Helpline and, among other things, we designed and distributed Vet Helpline stickers a couple of years ago to help vets keep the contact details for these important services close to hand.

Alongside the emotional support these services offer, BVA has focused attention on a number of practical initiatives to reduce stress in the workplace, including development of the BVA legal helpline and our mediation and legal representation services.

We know from various member surveys that the first few years in practice are immensely stressful and that's why we launched the Young Vet Network in 2007 to provide a range of practical support mechanisms for new graduates, such as the popular *BVA New Graduate Guide*, networking and mentoring opportunities, model contracts of employment, and advice on CVs, interviews, personal development plans and more.

We've also combined this practical approach with an emphasis on health and well-being through our CPD programme. This September we are running a course on "Dealing with stress in the workplace" and we're delighted Rosie will be speaking in one of our congress sessions at this year's London Vet Show (LVS) – "A positive approach to stress". The BVA Careers Fair, which will return for the second year at LVS, has been designed to help vets who are struggling to take the next step in their careers and also includes

sessions on time management, striking the right work/life balance, and how to avoid being sued.

We've even taken the issue to an international level after I lobbied for a veterinary professional wellness stream at the World Veterinary Congress in Prague in September.

There's an awful lot going on to offer both emotional and practical support to vets and I'd encourage everyone to take advantage of the services on offer and seek help from friends and colleagues. We're a small profession and we need to look out for one another.

Yours faithfully,

**PETER JONES**, BVA president,  
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## Airing views in Vet Times

Dear editor,

Who does Danny Chambers (May 13 letter) think he is, quoting the likes of the Flat Earth Society and young-earth creationists as an argument for preventing the, I believe, more than 250 UK veterinary surgeons who practise homeopathy successfully from airing their views and telling their stories in a publication such as *Veterinary Times*? Has he never heard about the scorn and derision heaped upon Charles Darwin when he published *The Origin of Species*? Has he not heard about the mainstream vet who forgot to open his mind and died of neural constipation?

Yours faithfully,

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## Let it be the last word

Dear editor,

Please let Danny Chambers (May 13 letter) have had the last word on homeopathic remedies in veterinary medicine in the UK. His eloquent letter covered all the bases. There is no place for discussion of homeopathy in a credible scientific/medical magazine.

Yours faithfully,

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## Student number concerns

Dear editor,

I am aware there is considerable disquiet among the profession about rising student numbers, and the letter from Clive Curry (May 6 issue) was indicative of this.

Our role is to ensure standards for veterinary education are set, met and raised. We do not have a remit to lobby government on the issue of how many veterinary schools there ought to be, or how many students existing schools should take.

If we were to do so, it might (rightly) be felt by those who apply to us for accreditation of their qualifications that we are not impartial. We have commissioned a survey of the past five years' UK graduates to find out how long it took them to obtain their first jobs in practice. We hope to discern if there have been any trends over the past half decade. Other organisations can then feel free to use this information as they wish.

I, for one, will be very interested to see the results of the research, as we hear plenty of anecdote, but don't see much hard fact. We will publish the results in due course – likely to be mid to late summer.

Yours faithfully,

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## Contact for RPA guidance

Dear editor,

Many readers will be aware of the sudden passing of Peter Mann. He acted as a Radiation Protection Advisor (RPA) for many practices throughout the UK and these practices now find themselves without suitable guidance. What is perhaps not common knowledge is I have collaborated with Peter in the past and, with the endorsement of his widow, Yvonne, I have taken on his lists. Practices are invited to contact me for advice on how to proceed – [www.rpavet.co.uk](http://www.rpavet.co.uk)

Yours faithfully,

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## LETTERS to the EDITOR

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