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INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to bring you the Annual Report for 2017 which gives details of the activities we have been involved in during the past 12 months. We hope you find it informative and useful.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2017

Renay Rickard  
Helen Sanderson  
Julie Beacham  
Cath Grimsey  
Ian Wolstenholme  
Ruth Mackay  
Stuart Saunders  
Gillian Page  
Janie Clare  
Georgina Hills  
Diane Horner (‘till August 2017)  
Ashley Gray – New Director

Certification and Training Committee

John Goulding MRCVS  
Julie Beacham CVPM  
Louise O’Hara CVPM  
Roger Wilson MRCVS  
Georgina Hills CVPM  
Philippa Davis CVPM  
Kerry Scarlett CVPM  
Liz Howes CVPM

Honorary Members

Fiona Baxter  
John Bower  
Carole Clarke  
Rita Dingwall  
Nancy Fox  
Hanno Payne  
John Sheridan  
Maggie Shilcock  
Brian Wright  
Sarah Hibbert  
Iain Lorraine  
Rebekka Fiorani  
Pauline Graham  
Helen Sanderson  
Howard Brown  
Linda Marshall awarded 11.12.17

The Association is supported by a Secretariat

Linda Marshall (up to 31.10.17)  
Maria Barratt  
Cath Grimsey (from November 2017)

CVPM Holders 2017

Elizabeth Partridge VN, Ellie Stock Bishop, Clare Norlander
VPAC HOLDERS 2017

Nina Boddy, Katie Gulliver, Jane Taylor, Joanne Lester, Beverley Williamson, Ruth Bennett, Lotte Betts, Llinos Botwood, Catherine Breadner, Diana Nicole Burn, Grace Candlin, Joanne Carrier, Lauren Clark, Jessica Clarke, Yasmin Cranny, Kerry Edwards, Cait Griffiths, Beth Hamilton, Melissa Herring, Jenna Joshi, Lucy Kilgallon, Rebecca Lewis, Samantha Lewis, Megan Lovegrove, Sophie Martin, Laura McKechnie, Sioned Morris, Gemma Parry, Catherine Roberts, Madeleine Scott, Rebecca Short, Charlotte Thompson, Sarah Tolley, Zara White, Nicola Wilson, Michelle Bacon, Emma Pott, Elaine Andrewartha, Maxine Ketley, Charlene Barnes, Claire Turner, Laura Woolf

COMPANY SECRETARY REPORT

This will be the last VPMA Annual Report that I will be involved with, not because I am going anywhere, but because a momentous decision taken in June 2017 means that we will begin 2018 with a new trading name and identity. We launch at Congress 2018 as the Veterinary Management Group (VMG for short) and hope that this inclusive name helps everyone in the veterinary industry with an interest in management to realise that we are there for them. It is a fitting time for a rebrand as the VPMA will be 25 years old in 2018.

The new VMG brand has a modern logo which incorporates our three main aims – learn, share, grow - into the strapline. The colours used also link back through the previous logos in that we have retained the turquoise and grey theme which should make us easily recognizable. In early 2018 a new VMG website will replace the existing VPMA one.

It has also been a year of great change in the running of VPMA as Linda Marshall, one half of the VPMA Secretariat, left to work outside the veterinary field at the end of October. Linda and her colleague Maria Barratt had made up the Secretariat since late 1998 and they have been a constant presence for the membership, the old VPMA Council and now the VPMA Board.

The Secretariat carry out all the administrative functions for the organization and Linda and Maria have always guided and prompted the Officers and the Board to ensure that we comply with the requirements of the Articles and the Limited Company. Fortunately, Maria has remained and we were extremely lucky that VPMA Financial Director Cath Grimsey was seeking employment at that time and offered to take on Linda's role. We would all like to thank Maria, Linda and Cath for their hard work and dedication throughout the year.

Due to the popularity of the VPMA, 2017 has been another busy one for the Secretariat as we have a record number of members. The total membership stood at 912 as at 30th November. There has been an increasing swing to group rather than individual memberships which reflects the changing ownership of UK veterinary businesses.

The VPMA Board held another strategy day in June 2017 to build on the outcomes of the previous two, guided by the same facilitator. These days are immensely useful and allow us to review our current position in this fast-changing world and evolve with it. Our links with other veterinary associations and bodies also give us a comprehensive overview of the industry as we have representatives on BVA Council, the RCVS Practice Standards Group & Mind Matters Initiative, and the VN Futures project. It is increasingly recognised that practice managers are the gatekeepers of many practices and are often responsible for implementing the new initiatives which result from this collaboration.

The relationship with SPVS remains mutually beneficial with the excellent joint Congress and CPD events plus our journal, Practice Life. In May, for the second time, VPMA sponsored the Head Nurse Congress organized by the College of Animal Welfare and held in Northamptonshire. This event really highlights the need for training and support for senior nurses moving into a management role and we gained several new members as a result. A few weeks later we were at VetFest in Surrey and in November we had a stand at London Vet Show.

The VPMA Board is currently made up of 11 people from a variety of backgrounds including independent practices, groups, corporates and industry. Past President Helen Sanderson will be
stepping down at Congress 2018 after many years of service and we all thank her for her contribution to the success of VPMA. A recent advertisement for new Board members resulted in a number of good applicants who have been shortlisted and interviewed.

Julie Beacham CVPM
Company Secretary

MEMBER BENEFITS

The VPMA recognises that over the years networking and support are two of the main reasons why people take out membership. Practice management can be a solitary occupation and meeting other managers serves two purposes – building friendships and gaining knowledge.

Open floor discussions have been favoured as the format for your regional meetings over the last year – this is a great way for practice managers to chat amongst themselves and build relationships, whilst sharing experiences and knowledge with each other.

The VPMA Eggroup is another fantastic tool for our members to use, being a day to day communication network through which information and advice can be exchanged. We have seen topics such as appraisals, employee benefits, uniforms, advertising, contracts and many more … it continues to be a popular forum.

2017 has also seen the continuation of our Lunchtime Management Updates which have been free of charge to VPMA members. These have proved very popular, allowing managers to fit them in with their busy working day. All past webinars are still available to view via the VPMA website.

We were delighted to introduce a series of 6 webinars in 2017 for those “New to Management”. They ran during the Spring and were hugely popular and were available free of charge to VPMA members. Non-members were also able to sign up for these at a cost either as a set or for an individual webinar. VPMA members can still access the recordings of these in the members only section of the website.

Other benefits of membership include the significantly reduced cost of attending the joint VPMA/SPVS CPD and the joint VPMA/SPVS Congress – both of which events combine with offering the ideal opportunity to network with your fellow practice managers.

A full list of other member benefits from affiliated service providers can be found on the VPMA website. These fall into two main categories – those which benefit the individual practice manager and those which benefit the practice. Often those which benefit the practice still make life easier for the manager as practice benefits include help with payroll, utilities, automated client reminders, health and safety etc.

We continue to strive to develop and improve member benefits. All such benefits are noted on the website and any new benefits will be uploaded as soon as possible.

Maria Barratt
VPMA Secretariat

BRITISH VETERINARY ASSOCIATION

During the year VPMA was represented at 4 BVA council meetings, held on 19.04.17 (London), 19.07.17 (London), 20.09.17 (Belfast) and 13.12.17 (London).

At the start of the year discussion was dominated by the “Brexit Report”, this was a lengthy document but one that was well thought through and addressed many of the concerns, much work continues on this topic.

We are now a year in to the governance review, this involves a structure with various committees and working parties, this is proving a good strategy moving forward

The BVA Strategic plan for 2018-2020 was prepared.

The Veterinary Surgeons Act was discussed, and much work will continue with the Policy committee. RCVS has convened the Legislation Working Party (LWP) to review whether this act needs amending.
Affiliate status was discussed and due to a number of organisations making a request for this status it was agreed this category will be closed to new requests. VPMA were assured the BVA values the qualities that our representation brings to the council.

A decision was made not to look for new premises but to remain at Mansfield Street. The property will undertake a major renovation and it will be transformed so it is “fit for purpose”.

It has been a pleasure representing the VPMA at BVA council. As members of the profession working at the heart of the operations and business we can certainly contribute to the plans and process moving forward.

Pauline Graham
VPMA’s BVA Representative

CERTIFICATION AND TRAINING (C&T) COMMITTEE REPORT

One of the stated aims of the VPMA is education (learn/share/grow) and providing training to develop and benchmark the skills of our members working in practice or the wider veterinary industry. Whilst there are an ever-increasing number of external training companies and academic institutions offering relevant courses and qualifications, the VPMA is proud to have a long history in this field since the first CVPM exams were held in 1996 and the VPAC was first awarded in 2002.

The C&T Committee is responsible for both the VPAC and the CVPM, and in 2017 has comprised Georgina Hills CVPM (Chair), John Goulding MRCVS, Julie Beacham CVPM, Louise O’Hara CVPM, Roger Wilson MRCVS, Philippa Davis CVPM, Liz Howes CVPM and Kerry Scarlett CVPM. Georgina will continue as Chair for 2018 with John and Julie stepping down, please note our thanks for all the hard work they have contributed to the committee and continued development of the CVPM.

The VPMA and Committee have been asked for a letter of support for a new Level 4/5 qualification in Practice Management which is being developed as a pathway for the BTEC in Animal Management. As the only attendance course available (it will be provided by FE colleges) and the involvement of the committee and industry the board would like to support the development of this qualification which can then lead on to the CVPM once in industry employment. The course is scheduled to be available in September 2018. Georgina Hills is liaising on this.

VETERINARY PRACTICE ADMINISTRATION CERTIFICATE (VPAC)

The VPAC is popular with both veterinary administrators and those wishing to gain an introductory qualification before moving into practice management. It is a useful qualification for junior or inexperienced managers who wish to develop their skills. Roger Wilson has been the C&T member responsible for VPAC during 2017 and will continue in 2018.

The course continues to be delivered as a distance learning course by Lynwood School of Veterinary Nursing in Dorset as well as being included in the BSc(Hons) Veterinary Nursing and Practice Management degree course delivered at Harper Adams University. However, this is the final year with Harper Adams. Roger has been working hard re-writing the modules with 50% of the old information removed and new tasks to demonstrate skills added. The Committee feel that VPAC now has much more of a focus with the new syllabus to be launched in April 2018.

VPAC information can be accessed from the Education section of the VPMA website at www.vpma.co.uk.

CERTIFICATE IN VETERINARY PRACTICE MANAGEMENT (CVPM)

A CVPM Information and Exam Preparation Workshop was held at Wendover Heights Veterinary Centre, Buckinghamshire in May 2017. After feedback from an awareness survey sent by the Secretariat we plan to hold additional workshops and locations in 2018.
The Committee continue to offer support to attend regional meetings and hold mini sessions on the CVPM. There will also be a session on education and the CVPM at Congress 2018 on the Friday at 3.30pm.

Six candidates were registered for the 2017 exams which were held on Friday 24th November in Witney, Oxfordshire. Unfortunately, two candidates were unable to attend due to personal circumstances and one failed in meeting the required standard. However, we were delighted that three candidates passed all elements of the exam to achieve the CVPM and one candidate who did not reach the required standard in the oral scenario questions only has been offered a resit of this section at Congress, which the candidate has gratefully accepted.

The total number of CVPM holders now stands at 77 and we congratulate Elizabeth Partridge VN, Ellie Stock Bishop and Clare Norlander. Clare will be receiving her certificate at the opening address of Congress.

To be eligible to sit the CVPM exam, candidates are required to meet the following criteria:

- Be full members of the VPMA throughout their registration period
- Register for CVPM and pay appropriate fees
- Be actively employed in a veterinary based management role (minimum period of 2 years’ experience is advised)

Candidates are required to notify Secretariat of their intention to sit the CVPM by 1st August in the year they intend to sit the exam. The required components for the 2017 CVPM were:

- A 3000 word essay entitled “How I have used my knowledge to benefit the veterinary environment in which I work”, submitted at the time of registration.
- A ten-minute PowerPoint presentation, based on a topic supplied one month prior to the exam, given on exam day, followed by a 15 minute structured discussion of the report and presentation with the examiners.
- Thirty minutes of discussion and questions based on a fictitious practice, the details of which were circulated to candidates two weeks prior to the exam date. This gave the candidates the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities in all six areas in the syllabus.
- A 30 minute oral component involving ten scenarios reflecting subjects and situations that can occur every day in veterinary management.

The VPMA Board believe that the CVPM continues to provide a valuable industry-recognised qualification for candidates who can demonstrate their ability to effectively manage a veterinary practice, hospital or similar.

Further details and information on the CVPM qualification, syllabus and exam process are available on the Education section of the VPMA website. Details of the next exam including dates and fees will be made available on the website in early 2018.

Report prepared by Georgina Hills CVPM on behalf of the C&T Committee, December 2017

REGIONS

2017 saw the forming of the new region for North East Scotland. Our thanks go to Michelle Murphy and Stephanie Simpson for coming together to deliver meetings in this area – we know it hasn’t been easy.

We are delighted to advise that during 2017 our RO’s have held a total of 15 meetings and collectively have attracted over 70 delegates. Well done to all of you for organising these meetings, we believe they are invaluable for our members.
In addition to the regular regional meetings, in conjunction with RCVS Mind Matters we held a series of Mental Health for Managers courses. In total we held 12 across the UK, attracting more than 125 delegates. Our thanks go do the team at RCVS for organising these events with us.

New for 2017 was the introduction of “Bring a Friend for Free”. As you are aware RO meetings are free of charge for VPMA members, but we wanted those members to encourage other people from their team to come along as well and not to be put off by the costs, so we introduced that they could bring a friend for free. This hasn’t exactly taken off … but we hope word will get round soon!

During the latter part of 2017 attendance at regional meetings has dwindled. The VPMA Board are now having discussions as to the future of regional meetings and how best to deliver them. These discussions will be held with the Regional Organisers with input from members.

Watch this space …. changes may be on the horizon!

Linda Marshall
VPMA Secretariat

THE VETERINARY DEFENCE SOCIETY

The VPMA have continued to support and be closely involved with the VDS by sponsoring and/or attending events held throughout the UK during 2017.

The VPMA was represented by members of the VPMA Board of Directors. The events supported by the VPMA were:

Graduate Reunions
RVC 2 September
Glasgow 9 September
Nottingham 7 October
Liverpool 28 October
Cambridge 4 November
Dublin 11 November
Bristol 25 November
Edinburgh 2 December

One day seminars on communication issues for all members of the practice team:

Managing Difficult Situations
21 March, Nottingham
22 March, Leeds
23 March, Manchester

Communicating as a Team
11 October, Northampton

Thank you to everyone who has represented VPMA at these events. The training and educational work that the VDS deliver is of great value to delegates and their work is supported wholeheartedly.

If any members would be interested in assisting at these events in the future please speak to the Secretariat.

RCVS PRACTICE STANDARDS SCHEME 2017 UPDATE

3282 practice premises are now part of the Scheme, representing just over 60.5% of all eligible practice premises. This has increased from 58% membership of eligible practice premises from this time last year. Small Animal still represents the biggest type of species accredited – 2770 Small Animal, 523 Equine and 494 Farm Practices.

At present, Awards are going from strength to strength with 111 practices holding 170 Awards which is an increase from 46 practices holding 77 Awards this time last year which is a phenomenally successful outcome. The most frequently achieved Awards are still Client Service followed by Emergency and Critical Care.
The RCVS will be holding their next PSS Awards Ceremony at the SPVS/VPMA Congress on Thursday 25 January 2018 which the RCVS are hoping will be well attended. Pam Mosedale, Lead Assessor will present a talk on top tips for gaining Awards and other guest speakers will include a testimonial from a practice who have recently gained the EQ Client Service Award. The newly appointed Director of Communications at the RCVS will also attend to launch and present the newly designed Marketing Toolkit which we expect will be an extremely useful tool for all practices in the Scheme.

More assessors were urgently needed for the Scheme due to several assessors announcing their retirement this year plus three assessors going on maternity leave. A successful recruitment drive was carried out in September and October and 4 new assessors plus 5 reserve assessors were recruited (the reserve assessors will be offered positions as other spots for assessors open due to resignation, retirement etc.) and the new assessors will begin carrying out shadow assessments in early 2018.

The new Stanley IT system went ‘live’ in late July and any practices due for their routine assessment from October onwards began logging on and using the system. The system appears to be working well so far and early feedback is positive. More work is being carried out all the time with the development company to continue adding enhancements to the system. The PSS team were receiving an extremely high volume of calls from practices and assessors with queries around how to use the system which it was initially launched. Training sessions have been carried out with larger practice groups in order for them to have a Stanley ‘champion’ to cascade down information and explanations and further training has been carried out with the assessors also. This has greatly reduced the volume of Stanley related phone calls received by the team and they have coped wonderfully well under such pressure in dealing with the new system, fielding enquiries while learning how to use it themselves plus continuing to do the day to day work around running the Scheme!

Once again, it has been another busy year for the RCVS PSS Group. Any feedback from VPMA members would be welcome and if you also have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the VPMA representative Rita Dingwall via the VPMA Secretariat.

Rita Dingwall, CMgr, MCMI, CVPM
VPMA Past President

VPMA/SPVS COMBINED CPD 2017

The VPMA/SPVS Joint CPD programme continues its work to provide high quality, innovative non-clinical CPD for the whole practice team. During 2017 we have put on 14 CPD days across the country including Scotland, Northern Ireland and many parts of England. We have also had two focus days, one of which was completely new, Focus on Finance along with Focus on the Team. Focus on Finance proved very popular and the feedback was very positive and so we have decided to repeat that again this year. Both focus days ran two streams to provide different levels of CPD whether you are just starting off or are more experienced in the industry.

Our CPD days have had a wealth of different speakers, some completely new to the veterinary market and some more recognised names and we are very grateful to them for all the effort that they put in to making these days interesting and relevant.

Work has already started on next year’s events and again we have a full programme including a Focus on Finance where we aim to build on last year’s success. We will put on 16 events and hope to base them in as many different locations as possible. Again we hope to have a range of speakers, some well known faces and some completely new to give different perspectives on our business. In this way we hope to bring an innovative approach to our CPD events.

The CPD chairs this year have been Ruth Mackay for VPMA and Catriona Curtis from SPVS working along with Jenny Stuart from Keystone. Many thanks go to Jenny and her team for all the hard work that goes into arranging events such as these.

A big thank you also goes to our sponsors, Bayer and Royal Canin whose contributions have enabled us to bring the best speakers to our events.
We also sincerely thank all our members who support the programme and give us very useful feedback which we endeavour to use to develop our future events.

Ruth McKay, CPD Chair
VPMA

COMMUNICATION

Magazine
The past year has seen the continued development of Practice Life magazine published quarterly by Mojo Consultancy and edited by Ian Wolstenholme for VPMA and Leigh-Anne Brown for SPVS. In its fourth editorial year, the magazine (which additionally is mailed to members of both associations in digital format) has featured many areas of interest to practice managers, nurses and vet owners from a number of industry names, but crucially as the title suggests, has drawn upon the experiences and case studies of real people in real practices. Editions have varied in length dependant on advertising support and any special features. As this member benefit continues to grow and develop, it is hoped that the challenges and successes of practices here and abroad will be shared with readers and to that end we encourage and welcome articles for inclusion in future issues to libby@mojoconsultancy.com

Website and Social Media
The VPMA website (www.vpma.co.uk) continues to be a valuable information resource for members and visitors and has recently been overhauled to include current topics and trends in the veterinary management arena. As a membership tool the website is built for ease of use and is a comprehensive directory of what that which the VPMA offers its membership to learn, share and grow. Bolting onto the website, our social media presence via Facebook and Twitter continues to develop (facebook.com/TheVPMA and @TheVPMA) which is an excellent way of staying in touch with association news.

Trade Stands
During 2017 we once again took a trade stand at the London Vet Show. The exhibition provided the VPMA with a busy stand and good profile.

Ian Wolstenholme, VPMA Board
VPMA Editor

VETERINARY BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

The VPMA and VBD work together to support mutual activities for the benefit of our members and the development of Veterinary Practice Management.

PETPLAN AWARDS

Practice Manager of The Year
The VPMA were involved in the 2017 Petplan Awards for the Practice Manager of the Year 2017, whose winner receives a years’ free membership to the VPMA. Entries were sought from owners, managers and all other veterinary staff and a healthy bundle of entries was submitted. The judges were unanimous in awarding Anne Corson from Pennard Vets, Tonbridge, Kent the title of Practice Manager of the Year. Anne was crowned Practice Manager of the Year at this year’s Petplan awards in April.

Anne was in a final-3 line-up with Ben Everett of Goddard Veterinary Group, London and Clare Dudley of Vets4Pets Swindon.

Anne is a crucial member of the team behind the scenes keeping everyone together. Anne enjoys going to work and feels that all the staff are like a little family; she enjoys meeting and greeting the clients some of whom have become personal friends. Her colleagues say she is very organised and enjoys getting involved in the community and has helped make the practice a great success over the past few years. Anne does a lot of charity work like swimathons and moon walks.

Anne took advantage of the years’ free membership of the VPMA which we hope she has found useful.

Linda Marshall
VPMA Secretariat
CONGRESS

Congress continues to grow and get better every year. We are delighted to announce that Congress 2017 made VPMA/SPVS a profit of £117,292 which when split equally gives VPMA a total of £58,646. The feedback we got from the exhibitors following the move downstairs was very positive and we have had no problem in selling these spaces which has given us record sponsorship before our delegate sales. We also got some positive feedback from delegates regarding the added space allowing for easy access to see the suppliers; we will continue to keep this format for as long as we continue at Celtic Manor.

This is one of the few hotels that can accommodate the size of our Congress, but it is also expanding so will be able to keep up with our growth whilst making sure we keep that friendly family atmosphere by ensuring we are all under one roof - this is what makes our Congress so successful and unique. It is a most luxurious hotel, so having a bit of me time will also be possible!

This year’s format remains similar with five streams running alongside each other including a High Performing stream, Wellbeing stream and continuing with our popular Equine stream. After the great success last year of our “New to Management” stream on the Friday we are again running the day, and SPVS are running their “New to Ownership” stream again on the Saturday, following feedback we have moved these streams to a proper room.

Networking has always been an important aspect of Congress, and again following the success of last year we have endeavoured to ensure entertaining social events with a repeat “comedy night” on the Thursday night and our glittering “Moulin Rouge” ball on the Friday night.

Keystone Events Ltd. have undertaken the administration of Congress, and we would like to thank them for their continued hard work to make Congress such a great event.

Helen Sanderson, VPMA Board