

PRESS RELEASE

Bella Moss Foundation Gives Cautious Welcome To Practice Standards Scheme

THE BELLA Moss Foundation gave a cautious welcome to the public launch of the Royal College Of Veterinary Surgeon's Practice Standards Scheme scheduled for March 27th, 2006.

In accepting an invitation to attend the launch, Foundation President and Founder, Jill Moss, said, "This is a move in the right direction, but there is still a great deal for the College to do."

"The RCVS Practice Standards Scheme was set up to establish a quality assurance framework to promote and maintain the highest standard of veterinary care and to make more information available about veterinary practices, and so give clients greater choice, but even some within the veterinary profession itself believe that the scheme lacks the ambition to make a truly effective difference to the way veterinary practice is carried out.

"The scheme fails to address the crucial issue of infection control. It may be very well to say that practices must be clean and well maintained, but in the Scheme there is no requirement that practices develop written policies to guide staff on effective infection control practice. We think it is unacceptable that practices will be required to have written policies on communication but nothing that says gloves and masks should be worn during surgical procedures. It reflects entirely the wrong set of priorities to require vets to communicate effectively before addressing poor clinical practice."

Moss said that this was not the only criticism of the Scheme.

"We think there is an unanswerable case for making the scheme compulsory. At present it is still up to individual vets whether they join or not, and this can hardly inspire confidence in pet owners, particularly when some excellent practices have decided not to participate. Although the College has effectively combined the two schemes that were previously run by the British Veterinary Hospitals Association and the British Small Animal Veterinary Association into one and put its name to it, there is little evidence that new practices have joined the scheme in any significant numbers. Even veterinary practitioners question the benefit of going through the cost and upheaval of being inspected and meeting other criteria when the practice down the street may not.

"Nor is it true that non-participation in the scheme is an indication of poorer quality service. We know that the College would like the scheme to become a benchmark of quality, but that is unlikely to happen whilst participation remains voluntary. The only way to make higher standards the norm is to make the scheme compulsory.

The Foundation also believes that by making vets responsible for their own practice and the conditions in which they work will force any bad practices out of business much more effectively than commercial competition. If a vet agreed to work in conditions that contravened or failed to meet the required standard then that vet would be in breach of the code of practice and would have to

account for their decision to work under such conditions. This would have the benefit of forcing standards higher and would remove the current incentive to ignore dangerous or sub-standard conditions or unprofessional working practice.

“On the whole The Bella Moss Foundation welcomes the steps the RCVS has taken on this matter, but it urges the College to set in place the mechanisms that will truly improve infection control and clinical practice,” concluded Moss.

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