

Response to RCVS statement on complementary and alternative therapies

The new position statement on homeopathy and other complementary therapies issued by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) has serious implications for the whole profession and the future of veterinary medicine.

The Faculty of Homeopathy is joining with the British Association of Homeopathic Veterinary Surgeons to engage with the RCVS to outline their concerns in the following regards:

The RCVS failed to consult adequately with stakeholders actually involved in homeopathy and complementary medicine before considering and issuing its statement. This is contrary to normal procedure followed by the RCVS when reviewing important matters relating to clinical practice.

In the disputed area of evidence, the RCVS states it expects veterinary surgeons to offer treatments “underpinned by a recognised evidence base”. Contrary to the RCVS position there is quality evidence supporting the efficacy of the therapy. The evidence is inconclusive – in the same way the evidence base for many conventional medicines used in veterinary practice as well as human medicine is inclusive. If the RCVS were to apply the same evidential criteria used for homeopathy to all treatments there would be far fewer clinical options available to the profession.

There is growing interest in homeopathy from animal owners, as they see conventional medicines regularly failing or producing adverse side-effects. This is especially true in livestock farming where there is a drive to reduce the dependence on antibiotics in light of concerns about antimicrobial resistance. At such a time, it is contradictory that the RCVS fails to engage with vets who are best placed to offer advice on the appropriate use of homeopathy.

It is clear that by adopting this position in relation to homeopathy and other complementary therapies the RCVS is limiting the clinical freedom the veterinary profession has always enjoyed. Moreover, in allowing a vocal minority to influence a policy stance the RCVS has set a dangerous precedent where similar groups could restrict clinical freedom further in future, as well as stifle innovation, research and the development of new treatments. This presents a far greater threat to animal welfare than homeopathy could ever do.

Note to editors:

The Faculty of Homeopathy was founded in 1844 and incorporated by Act of Parliament in 1950. The Faculty sets standards for homeopathic education for all statutorily regulated healthcare professionals who use homeopathy as an adjunct to conventional medicine, including professional veterinary surgeons. It is a UK General Medical Council (GMC) accredited Designated Body for the revalidation of doctors.