



What person doesn't make a mistake?

Lizzie Lockett, CEO of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons.

Lizzie Lockett:

Thank you, Jackie. I take it from the fact that you are all coming back in drips and drabs, that you've had some really amazing engaging sessions and workshops. So I'm the unfortunate person that sounds between you and your lunch. So I shall try and be as quick as possible. So I was given this title of 'What Vet Doesn't Make a Mistake', and now I'm the Chief Executive, I can do what I like. So my first thing is to change the title, actually. So yes, it's about vets, but really what person doesn't make a mistake? So there are some special aspects about veterinary surgeons, and veterinary nurses being part of a regulated profession. But let's always remember that all of us make mistakes at any time. So, so...

Member of the audience:

Could you also change the first word to say, 'which' <laughs>

Lizzie Lockett:

Could do, I could, but do you know, no..<laughs>. Now who remembers the band, James? Anybody in my era? Nicely done. I did a little test on my team in the office. Most of them are much younger than me, and they're like, 'Err, looks a bit like Vet Futures.' so you've all been busy, but I want you just to stand up, please. Now I want you to sit down... See the link now, James, 'Sit down.' I want you to please sit down. I'm not going to sing it. If you've ever driven faster than the speed limit, and been caught doing it.<laughing> I want you now to sit down if you've ever forgotten somebody's birthday who's close to you.<laughing> And I want you to sit down if you've ever forgotten to check if you've turned the gas off.

Oh, we've got two people still standing. Well done you. You can take a seat but congratulations for not forgetting. So what I'm trying to say there is breaking a rule, missing something, forgetting to do something, not checking something properly. We all do it all of the time, all of the time, all of us. And in most walks of life, it may be something as simple as forgetting to send somebody a birthday card or getting something slightly wrong. But when you are dealing with life-and-death situations, those same mistakes can lead to rather more catastrophic results. And you may have seen the story that was in the Telegraph just a couple of days ago about a sad situation where a veterinary surgeon made what was an error in the same way that all of those things are errors, but it had wider-reaching effects for her patients.

So what I want to talk today about is, is why it's important to think about those mistakes, think about the context in which they're made, and think about how we can turn those into learning opportunities. Think about blame culture and learning culture. Now the first thing people might say is, 'Well, what business is this of the College? I can understand why it's the business of RCVS Knowledge to look at quality improvement. But what business is it of the College, you are there about regulation, aren't you?' This is the image that you often see - the gavel, people being struck off. 'Surely What you do is all about blame, isn't it? Isn't there an aspect of which there's always going to be blame, a portion of what the RCVS is around.' but actually if you look at our strapline, it's about setting, maintaining, and advancing standards.

And it's in that advancing bit, in that continual learning culture that we need to look at those mistakes and those errors and make sure that there's a feeling within the veterinary profession that they can be considered properly as part of a learning process. Advancement only really works if we're all learning together. What I want to do over the next sort of 10 - 15 minutes or so is give you a flavour of some of the things that we are looking at from a College point of view to try and put that culture in place. And it's something that we're taking seriously right from the top of the organisation. So our current Senior Vice President, Chris Tufnell, who was our president last year, said at RCVS Day sadly, we often hear that there are vets and nurses out there who live in fear of the RCVS.

This is something of which I'm personally ashamed and I will do everything I can to replace this fear. We also looked at, as a staff body, we've spent a bit of time looking at a particular video that I would urge you to see. I haven't got time to show it to you today by a heart specialist in the US human heart specialist Brian Goldman called 'Doctors Make Mistakes. Can we talk about that?' Which looks at the impact of working in a profession where talking about mistakes seems to be taboo on the impact of actually learning and developing. So these things are starting to come together into sort of ideas coalescing around blame and learning around the profession's ability to learn from its mistakes around the fear factor from the College, which might mean that people are covering up things when they go wrong.

So that what may have been a small mistake, the veterinary equivalent of forgetting a birthday card, ends up being something that our disciplinary committee is interested in because of the fact that people are then looking to change notes or lie about it or not talk to their colleagues in an honest and open confession about it. Also, Jackie mentioned at the beginning that I work on the Mine Matters project, and we've seen sadly, the impact that the idea of a culture in which people don't feel they're going to be treated fairly if they own up to having got something wrong, can have a real impact on mental health. And longer term it can have an impact on public health and animal health and welfare if that learning piece isn't in place. So we talk a little bit about a no-blame culture, which is a slightly difficult one because it's sort of trying to define something by a negative essentially.

And what's more useful is if we think about a learning culture or maybe even a just culture where what we're looking at is mistakes that are made. Our reaction to them is proportionate to the training, the situation, the circumstances. So the people who still do things wrong wilfully with bad intent still get the treatment that is appropriate to them. So that's not to say that we as a College are suddenly not going to take anybody to task when they do something wrong. But it's about making sure that, you know, any gross professional misconduct is really taken in that way. And if that happens if we are able to, as Alastair Campbell says here, evaluate defeat properly then, then that's a positive for everybody. The animal-owning public may feel that if, if the College says that we are looking to inculcate a, a professional culture, which is less around blame, that actually that's bad for them and that we won't be taking matters seriously.

But actually, it's a positive overall for animal health and welfare. And also the idea that if we... People talk to us at the College, if they've made a mistake or feel they might be entering into an area which might cause something to go wrong, it's much better to talk to us earlier. Good news is bad news delivered early. And what we'd like to see on this graph here, don't worry about the detail, but this has just been published in our RCVS Facts 2016 and the green column is the advice calls that we receive. And the grey column is the concerns that we receive. And what will be fantastic over time is if that advice column goes up and up and up and the number of concerns goes down and down. So people are recognising that it's okay to talk about things that have gone wrong or things that they think might go wrong, situations that they're in that might cause difficulties, and actually have those conversations. So they're seeing us as a positive regulator, somebody who's enabling them to be the best vet they can be. Rather a sort of close the door after the stables...hang on a minute... Close the stable door after the horse has bolted regulator who's only interested in telling them off when things have gone wrong.

The culture piece is interesting. So two conkers, 'Good day at work.?' 'Yeah, not bad. Got a splitting headache though' you could say, well that's kind of going to happen if you're a conker. You're going to get beaten over the head every day. And sometimes people say that about the veterinary profession. Well, we're not going to change anything. That's just how vets are. That's just how nurses are. That's just how the profession is. We're all scared of making a mistake. That's human nature. It is human nature to an extent. When I was just about to stand up here and George said to me, 'Don't move away from the microphone too much because we are recording this as a podcast.' My first thought was 'Hells bells, I better make sure I don't swear too much. I better not say anything that I wouldn't want to be broadcast to the nation.'

You know, we all worry all the time about getting it right and being a perfectionist. But that's not to say we can't gradually start to change the culture. We have shown that it's worked around communication skills. So back about 15, 20 years ago, I was involved with a project, with the Veterinary Defence Society, looking at communication skills and can we improve them? And the feeling very much at the time from a broad sway that the profession was you either can communicate or you can't. You're born with it or you're not, it's not something you can be taught. And actually, over a period of time, I think that's been shown to be a lie actually. People have been taught communication skills through a detailed program of activities. Similarly, when we started off with the Mind Matters project nearly three years ago now, there was quite a bit of uncertainty about the possibility of success with that project.

'Well, if people have got difficulties, they're not going to listen. You're not going to attract the right people. You can't teach people to be more resilient. It's something you are born with or not.' And again, I think over time we've shown that you can move. You may be born with certain skills or certain natural abilities, but you can move. And I think the same is true looking at culture, around learning, around trust, around fairness. That's quite important. But it's not all about the culture. And I've just been sitting in on a couple of the workshops as well. There are practical things that we can do to try and move this. You know, it may well be that people don't talk about mistakes because they're worried they're going to get ticked off. It may well be a practical thing. They don't have time in the day to do it, or they don't have a room in the practice that's big enough for everybody to get into, or they don't actually understand what it is they are talking about and how they might change. So there are some practical steps that we can take alongside the broader, the broader cultural piece. I also think that there's this piece about mistakes again, and this relates to mental health issues, which is around a certain prevalence of perfectionism in the veterinary profession. If you've got time again, try and have a look at this video by Ken Robinson, which is around what happens, what changes people's mindset. So if you are...he talks in schools and he says, if you ask school kids a question, they'll all put their hands up and they don't care if they've got it right or wrong. They just want to say something, they want to get out there. But then as the years go by, people tend to sit on their hands because they're worried about not getting it right.

They're worried about being shown up. And then the transition moves where people start asking questions in conferences and you'll have been there. People only start asking questions about things that they already know the answer to. They don't genuinely ask a question because they want to learn, they ask a question because they want to show that they've got a bit of knowledge and they want to try and catch somebody out. And you, you will all recognise this sort of behaviour. So his premise is that there's something that we do to children that kills their creativity because they're not prepared to be wrong. And I think there's probably something in that too as well from a, from a veterinary team point of view. And part of that is how we perhaps educate our students', vet and veterinary nursing students, the relationship between students and lecturers. Hands up, anybody who remembers a lecturer that they had telling them about a mistake that they made as a student or as a practitioner.

One or 2, 3, 4, 5. Okay. And hands up anybody who would list a lecturer or somebody who is part of their university experience as a formative influence on their careers. A lot. So see the disconnect

there. So those people, those individuals having a huge formative influence, but not necessarily telling a positive story around being honest about making mistakes and what you can do around it. So that's something that we need to look at. This chap's interesting and there's, there's many of these now on the internet, started a bit of a trend. If you Google him, he's put up his CV of failures. So what he's put up is all the grants that I didn't get, all the jobs that I applied for, but I didn't get, all the papers that were not accepted for publication. And we could all do these. And it's very different from the CV that you put together to put yourself in the best possible light.

Having just been through an incredibly time-consuming and rigorous process to get the new role that I have at College. You know, I know all about putting your best foot forward, but sometimes it's important to remember that all of us have these potential levels of things. When the failure becomes something that's hidden, you learn something from understanding, what people's journey was to get to where they're going to. So those of you who are leaders in the room, and I don't just mean at the top of the veterinary profession that leaders in your teams, do remember to talk about how you got to where you got to. This one I like. So I'm in a group on Facebook for Oxford University ... "to err is human, to forgive is divine, neither of which is University policy." You could strike that out and say practice policy or RCVS policy or any organisation.

So although at the College we obviously focus on certificates and CPD and diplomas and specialist status and those are all key things and, and very useful from an aspirational point of view. Actually learning is a process. It's not just about a series of qualifications. And I think that's something that, that we really need to, to make clear in terms of how we, we look at the veterinary progression towards continuing to be better all of the time and how we support RCVS Knowledge and it's really, really excellent developments around quality improvement. And talking about certificates, I just wanted to share a little story with you. So this chap here, not Stephen May, the other one, an old friend of mine from school, some of you may know him, David Gould. And he just collected his Fellowship recently in ophthalmology. So on the 20th of October, which is Fellowship Day, I posted this picture to his Facebook feed because I was in the audience, took a picture of him. On the 21st of October, <laugh>, he posted this picture to his Facebook feed and this is his lovely dog, Bea, and that's his fellowship scroll <laugh>.

And at this point, I'm only imagining what the 'B' is starting to stand for. Now, apparently, that's just a bit of fun. But in that situation then he and his wife have this hilarious diatribe going on Facebook about whose fault it was and who left the scroll on the floor and why was the dog allowed to access it. Shouldn't it have been la la la. So you can see how it works and this idea that, you know, there's a blame culture around here and whose fault to that. So yeah, always look after your certificates. So we do take learning culture very seriously at the College. And in fact, when we launched our strategic plan at the beginning of this year, it's one of five strands of activity in there. And an ambition to establish to which extent there's a blame culture in the rent professions, the role that we play in it.

So really accepting the fact that the College has a role here either willingly or as part of some sort of myths that get perpetuated about the College that we really need to try and address the impact that it has on welfare affects nurses, owners, animals, and how we could all move together to, to develop a culture of greater learning and personal development. And there's a whole range of things in the strategic plan that we are doing to try and address this. I won't go through all of these with you now, although I'm very happy to have a chat with you about the detail of it if you're interested, I'm conscious of lunch on the horizon. The first part of that was a survey that we did earlier in the year where over 7,000 vets and nurses had their say. We were asking questions around reporting mistakes, trust, communication, incident reporting, complaints handling, who the influences are.

In general terms, the feedback was relatively positive, but I think it did show that there are things that the College needs to do. Lemme just excuse me while I grab the stats. We haven't published this yet by the way. We're in the process of doing some more qualitative work around it so we can

publish a bit more of a detailed report. Of the people who responded over three-quarters were vets, 20% nurses and the rest were practice managers and others. 90% felt that they were held to account in their practice if something goes wrong. But there was a high level of fear of that sort of accountability. Over half felt there were fair and balanced systems in the workplace for conducting investigations. So that does leave about half who felt that they weren't. And similarly, with the College, we've still got quite a lot of work to do to convince people, I think, that the way we handle complaints is fair and balanced. I'm confident that they are, it is fair and balanced, but we need to better explain that process and be a little bit more transparent in the way that we work, I think. So that's something on my, on my to-do list. What was good though that there were high levels of trust within practice around how colleagues might work with them if there'd been mistakes, which was really positive. So when you think about how we can open this out and reach a broader levels of individuals kind of across the businesses. Regulated professions can only work if there's a high level of trust both within the profession and between the profession and those who are impacted by their behaviours so that the people who are benefiting from their services essentially.

So I think we have to accept as a College that we've got a major role in this, but it does spread into other areas. So for example, how the media reports our disciplinary cases, we are always very careful not to say in press releases that we're striking anybody off because it's quite a volatile language, but often that gets reported in the media in that way. So there's just things that we can look at there, I think to reduce the fear factor. Just as an interesting aside you might think that the College, we are always telling you when you've got stuff wrong and that we're being very unfair about it. So I just wanted to share this one with you. When we sent out that survey unfortunately there was a typo in it. It happened. Doubly unfortunately, it happened to be in one of the headers, so it appeared on quite a few pages. And we had one gentleman, a veterinary surgeon who emailed us saying 'I took the survey, but if the attention to spelling is an indicator of how the RCVS now functions, it was a complete waste of my time.' So we get those too. It's not just you.

Other things that we've been doing around this area, as you, you probably know, is we've been focusing on more of an outcomes-based approach to CPD, more of a reflective approach so that people are again, looking at what they've learned with very much on the emphasis on the kind of 'what did you learn?', 'so what?' and then 'What next?' So those sort of three simple areas. Again, language is important. I think when we first launched that project, people felt that reflection meant writing a 5,000-word essay on something. And actually, we're looking for relatively short but thoughtful contributions from people. So that pilot's ongoing and it's just been broadened out. We are also looking at a review of graduate outcomes, which is a project that was triggered by the Vet Futures project that we're doing jointly with the British Veterinary Association and trying to look at how we can develop behaviours in new graduates through, through their veterinary teaching that enables them to, to deal better with some of the things that might lead to a fear of explaining where things have gone wrong.

So for example, to try and be more resilient, to be more self-directed, to be curious, and continue to learn. What was interesting was that I think there was a fear when we started that project that lots of technical things would be required to be added to the curriculum. Actually, there was a really quite clear consensus right at the beginning, and this is across a broad group of practitioners, employers' students and recent graduates that actually what needed to be addressed were behaviours and skill sets around some of those softer skills rather than clinical skills. So we're not going to end it with a, a veterinary curriculum that stretches for eight years, which is always good. And also another thing we've been doing around support and hopefully we'll be aware of some of this is our Mind Matters project. So the three strands of activity within that. One is prevent, so looking at what we can address within the veterinary professions that may lead to mental health issues. Second is protect, which is looking at developing skills for individuals while we change the bigger picture. And finally, support, which we mainly do at arm's length through funding of Vet Life and other services.

I think what's key there is that it's trying to make sure that people feel comfortable about their working environment and they feel that they've got the trust and the support of their peers. So finally, I think I'm almost running to time. I would just like to say it's actually really hard to do this stuff and it's not going to be a quick fix and we need everybody to be involved trying to be open-handed about mistakes. Sometimes somebody does something in the team and you just get really fed up with it.

And that's kind of okay, but you then just need to have the process to make sure that you treat that longer-term something which is, which is a positive. And just to give you an indication of that, I've tried over the last 20 minutes, not to mention this, but I feel I'm going to have to mention it. Spell my name wrong. Girls, you spelled my name wrong. I'm sorry. That's a mistake. We're going to deal with it. We'll have a learning lesson. But we need to move on. That's the other thing we need to move on. At this point, we need to move on to lunch, which is right behind you. And I think that's probably the next thing on the list. Is it Chris? Yeah. So thank you very much.

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