

VETERINARY IRELAND ROTA FORMATION PROJECT



1. Introduction

The provision of an efficient out-of-hours veterinary service has become increasingly difficult and costly in terms of time and money for the veterinary profession. As a service to the veterinary profession, Veterinary Ireland proposes to provide a mediation service to assist in the formation of practice rotas within local geographic areas.

A number of factors dictate that there is a pressing need for such cooperation between colleagues. The Veterinary Council of Ireland's *Code of Professional Conduct* clearly states that, as a duty to clients, arrangements must be made to provide 24 hr emergency cover for the care of animals.

It is pointless to have each practice in a confined area providing out-of-hours care when one or more members in the area could easily service the volume of work that might arise at unsocial hours.

The unnecessary commitment to the out-of-hours service is frequently at the expense of personal and family time, leading to stress within private lives. Many new graduates, especially those with young families, indicate at the commencement of their employment now that they are unwilling to work outside of 'normal' hours and this puts further pressure on the existing practice owners.

Many rural practices that have been traditionally large-animal based and have worked over large distances are being forced to close so the remaining practices become relatively isolated with a reduced opportunity for shared rotas. Conversely, there are an increasing number of companion animal practices which are being concentrated in urban areas and these lend themselves especially to a shared rota system.

Traditionally, there has been a great reluctance to organise rotas in rural practices in Ireland. This has been due to a variety of reasons – for example, a fear of competition, a fear of poaching, a fear of undercutting, a fear of neighbouring practices gaining access to information on methods of treatment, charging etc. etc. Experience has shown that these fears are totally groundless where a proper system is established and members trust one another.

Regrettably, in many instances, neighbouring practices have barely spoken to one another so that the communication is not there to initiate a rota. Veterinary Ireland proposes to facilitate this contact and establish a robust rota system under strict rules.

But the fundamental issue is one of trust and that is a matter for each individual member. To develop trust, it will be necessary to set aside all the aforementioned preconceived erroneous notions as to why a rota could not work. The arrogance of assumption of having a better self-worth must be replaced by a trust in colleagues in whom one will discover new qualities and virtues as well as new friendship, cooperation and support – not to mention a new freedom within work that allows for more family and recreational time.

2. Benefits.

The benefits to members will be immediate and obvious.

By increasing the time available for family life it is hoped to achieve reduced rates of separation, divorce, suicide and alcoholism which currently afflict the veterinary profession to a significant degree.

Family members especially children will have their parent in the family home for a greater period of time improving parenting skills. Currently, veterinary practitioners especially in rural Ireland are experts at 'stretching' work into longer hours to appear busy and they also accentuate the 'social' aspect of interacting with clients.

By reducing the 'grind' of continuous work, individual veterinarians could restore their zest for their work and be less tired during a more efficient working day. The rate of 'burn-out' would be significantly lowered.

Rotas provide the time and opportunity for leisure activities that are so essential for physical and mental health.

Greater cooperation between neighbouring practices would encourage a better overall service and improved collegiality in the profession.

Such rotas improve the respect that veterinarians have for each other and for the quality of each other's work leading to greater trust and local referral opportunities.



3. Proposals.

Veterinary Ireland will form an expert committee of experienced practitioners who have preferably been members of a rota. From this group, a delegation of two people will be used to provide a mediation service for any group of members who wish to set up a rota in a town or area. Preferably these mediators will be practitioners from a distant county to be more impartial towards the local group. Those members who have been helped to form a rota will ultimately be requested to act as mediators for new rotas in the future.

Veterinary Ireland will recommend to its members in each area that they explore the possibilities for a rota in theory and contact HQ if they are interested in forming one. This does not necessarily mean that they need to consult neighbouring practices at this stage. On being made aware of any possibility of a potential rota in an area even with a small number of cooperating veterinarians, Veterinary Ireland will write to all members in the area requesting an expression of interest in a rota service. The service will be open to members of the veterinary profession who are not members but they will be encouraged to become members in getting involved in the service.

Particular efforts will be made to include practices that may be somewhat isolated geographically.

Once a group of two or more practices with a similar species base in a reasonable geographic area have expressed an interest in forming a rota, Veterinary Ireland will call a meeting in a central location and invite the interested parties independently and without prejudice to attend. A member of the 2-person delegation will chair the meeting with a defined agenda and try to get cordial agreement and definition of a rota organized.

Veterinary Ireland, through its delegates, will present a framework of BASIC RULES of a rota for discussion by all interested parties present. The rules will apply to calendar, hours of responsibility, fees and payment arrangements to be applied. Once accepted - after whatever modification deemed necessary by the meeting - those rules must be adhered to.

The rota will be arranged for a specific trial period of say six months after which it can be reviewed and, if necessary, the assistance of the aforementioned delegates can be sought by the members of the rota individually and collectively.

Ultimately, the coalescence of rotas and the creation of central emergency clinics in larger urban areas will be encouraged.

It is to be hoped that in time, each rota will assume responsibility for its own affairs and allow for greater flexibility.

4. Conclusion.

The proposed model for this rota is a proven one that will significantly impact on the quality of life of participating members and their families. It can be developed to be more flexible and wide-ranging. It is a low-cost significant improvement that can be made to the practice and will have far-reaching benefits with no downside. Veterinary Ireland strongly recommends this initiative to our members and urges you to take that leap of faith that will change your work and your life forever.

If you are interested in further examining this possibility please complete the attached form and return it to Veterinary Ireland HQ.