A rewarding first year on RCVS council

Author: NIALL CONNELL

Categories: Vets

Date: September 29, 2014

NIALL CONNELL BVMS, CertSAO, MRCVS looks back on his first year on council, describing the helpful and friendly team at RCVS, as well as urging veterinary colleagues to consider ‘having a go’

RETURNING home from RCVS Day, I thought about my first year as an elected council member and reflected on what a great experience it had been.

I decided to try for RCVS council after the Glasgow RCVS Question Time in 2012. I was impressed by what chief executive Nick Stace had to say about the changes being planned by RCVS, his vision for the future, and I spoke to the friendly RCVS staff. I’m retired because of ill health (I suffer from MS) and do a small amount of work at the University of Glasgow School of Veterinary Medicine as a clinical and professional skills instructor. I love what I do there and I’m always conscious there is a window of opportunity for me regarding my health that may close at any point, so I want to make the most of the ability I have.

The election was a nervous and exciting affair with the online question and answer session, and I looked forward to the outcome. I was sad when Gordon Hockey called me to gently let me know I had been unsuccessful. Imagine my surprise and delight a few weeks later, when Gordon called back to say that because two members were standing down from council to join the newly devolved disciplinary committee, I was in. I felt like Indiana Jones, sliding under the door just as it crashed down.

I approached my first council meeting with some trepidation, but found everyone to be friendly and helpful. I am amazed by the amount of work that is dealt with at each meeting and, of course, that
requires everyone to be well-prepared and informed. There is a fair bit of reading, but, fortunately, almost no paperwork because it’s emailed out. Caroline Freeman, one of the lay members, took me under her wing and was a big help, explaining how things worked. I was over the moon to discover I had been assigned a place on VN council, which I only discovered by looking at the RCVS website. Fortunately, communications are generally much more efficient than that might suggest.

For RCVS council and VN council, I usually travel from Glasgow to London by train. It was occasionally awkward finding a hotel room in Westminster that was both reasonably priced and accessible for me. One room I stayed in had no window and if it was any smaller, I could have worn it to a meeting.

I enjoyed taking part in the RCVS Question Time sessions in York and north Wales. It is good to hear the opinions of the vets and vet nurses from different parts of the UK at these events and talk to them through the evening. I also met up with many vets, nurses and industry folk when I spent a day on the RCVS stand at BSAVA Congress. That was also an opportunity to work with some of the RCVS staff. The staff always work hard and have a great sense of humour. They have a lot of knowledge and not just about veterinary stuff. My appreciation of the later works of Bob Dylan has significantly increased.

One aspect I didn’t expect and, which is very rewarding and humbling, was the number of vets and vet nurses getting in touch with me because they were concerned about their health or issues at work. I’ve met several, spoken to others by telephone and email, and it’s been a really positive experience. It can be a tough job being a vet or a vet nurse and looking after one’s health is paramount.

I’m glad to be part of VN council because I’ve always had the greatest respect for veterinary nurses and their role in the veterinary team. I always tell vet students the best friends they can have when they graduate are veterinary nurses and I salute the knowledge and skills of the VNs I’ve worked with. It’s an exciting time because the veterinary nursing profession is on the verge of being formally recognised in our new charter. I led the professional declarations of the newly qualified VNs at Edinburgh Napier University recently and that is a career highlight for me. I’m now vice-chairman of VN council.

It has been an excellent year. I understand people in our profession get frustrated with Belgravia House, looking on it as an ivory tower. Council consists of many practising vets and vet nurses and able people from universities, and they are very aware of what’s going on. They are a fairly switched-on bunch. The RCVS is looking forward and the changes recently, such as 24/7 consultation, the royal charter, the speeding up and improvements in the disciplinary committee, are just part of that.

Communication is everything and you can find out what is going on via newsletters, emails, the
RCVS website, Twitter, Facebook and Flickr. It is an evolving process and I’m glad to be part of it.

Although the meetings are spaced throughout the year, there is always material to be read and decisions to consider. I’ve never known so much about the profession and its activities as I do now. Being a member of BSAVA and BVA is a huge help too. Now the first year has flown by, I’m keen to see what next year brings. I’ve found working with RCVS to be important and rewarding, so I would urge any veterinary surgeon or veterinary nurse who thinks they might be interested in getting involved to seriously consider having a go. You’ll be glad you did.

Follow me on Twitter@Grim_Raspberry
Edinburgh Napier University nurses’ declaration.

IMAGE: Andrew Coe.
RCVS stand at BSAVA Congress 2014 with Stuart Reid

IMAGE: Jacob Bland
Fiona Ferguson receiving her badge at the Napier declaration.

IMAGE: Andrew Coe
IMAGE: Jacob Bland