PRESS INFORMATION

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WSAVA Targets Global Veterinary Wellness Following Survey Results

Thousands of veterinary professionals around the world have reported experiencing stress and diminished well-being in an online survey conducted by the World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA).

The findings show that stress and diminished well-being are a problem for all members of the veterinary team and in all areas of the world. They also indicate that the most seriously affected appear to be females, younger professionals and veterinary nurses/technicians.

Conducted by the WSAVA's Professional Wellness Group (PWG), the survey was completed by more than 4,000 veterinary professionals and analyzed using the Kessler Psychological Distress tool, which measures anxiety and depression; a Satisfaction with Life scale and a Satisfaction with Career scale. The results were presented by Dr Nienke Endenburg, a psychologist and Co-Chair of the PWG during WSAVA World Congress in Toronto on 17 July and followed by an expert panel discussion.

The results also indicate a reluctance to talk about mental health in Africa and Asia. While this may not be an easy topic to discuss in any culture, as the profession is developing very quickly in these continents, particularly in Asia, the WSAVA believes that barriers to the open discussion of mental health issues are of significant concern.

During the subsequent panel discussion veterinary professionals were encouraged to take control of their well-being by making smart career choices, supporting their colleagues and committing to 'self-care.'

Panelist Dr Jen Brandt, the American Veterinary Medical Association's Director of Member Wellbeing and Diversity Initiatives, said: "Well-being is the outcome of individual choices, organizational culture and potentially a host of other factors.

"When we refer to self-care, we aren't just talking about behaviors and choices that are comfortable or easy. What we are really referring to is the intentional, consistent practice of taking an active role in protecting one's own well-being, recognizing when needs exist, and taking responsibility for addressing them.

"Sometimes, this requires making difficult choices, including leaving relationships or environments that are not a healthy fit. I often tell folks that we cannot give away what we do not have. If we want our environments to be healthy, a key starting point is prioritizing our own emotional and physical well-being."

Dr Endenburg said: "Our research – the first global study of veterinary wellness – confirms a probable correlation between a career in veterinary medicine and an elevated risk of mental health issues. It's likely that this is caused by a combination of factors including working environment, personal characteristics and client pressures. We are very concerned at the impact this is having on thousands of veterinary professionals worldwide and believe it must be addressed without delay.

She continued: "The study has provided us with some very important data which we are now analyzing in more detail and preparing for scientific publication. We will then develop an urgent action plan.

"As part of the plan, we will share the helpful resources already created by some veterinary associations. We will also develop additional tools to ensure all veterinary healthcare team members can access help when they have – or ideally before they have – a mental health problem. We hope our efforts will be another important step towards bringing about positive change and enhancing the well-being of all veterinarians globally."

Notes to editors:

'Shaping the Future: Wellness in the Veterinary Profession', was presented by Dr Nienke Endenburg, a human psychologist, who works at the veterinary school at the University of Utrecht, Netherlands. The expert panel comprised:

- Dr Jen Brandt, the American Veterinary Medical Association's Director of Member Wellbeing and Diversity Initiatives
- Dr Derick Chibeu, Co-chair of the PWG and Honorary Secretary of the Kenya Small and Companion Animal Veterinary Association
- Dr Marie Holowaychuk, a Canadian board-certified small animal emergency and critical care specialist and advocate for veterinary team well-being
- Dr Vicki Lim, who works in New Zealand and is the founder the Riptide Project, an international veterinary well-being initiative
- Mr Elwin van Oldenborgh, President-Elect of the International Veterinary Students' Association.

The WSAVA works to enhance the clinical care and welfare of companion animals globally, representing more than 200,000 veterinarians around the world through its 113 member associations. Its core activities include the creation of Global Guidelines which set standards for veterinary care in key areas of practice, including nutrition, pain management and welfare.

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