

A “professional but compassionate” touch

Wayne Ricketts, VCNZ, farewells a greatly valued colleague on her departure.

THIS VCNZ ARTICLE sees us farewell our Chief Executive/Registrar. I have had the pleasure of knowing Janet Eden for more than 10 years, both in a personal capacity and professionally in my roles as a previous NZVA staffer and now the VCNZ Professional Advisor. On the one hand I am delighted to be penning this, but on the other I am sad because I know how much she’ll be missed. For me, having been on both sides of the fence, so to speak, Janet has brought a professional but practical and compassionate touch to her role in an entity that many of us find rather daunting.

Janet, a Nelsonian, comes from farming stock, so has a natural affinity with animals and the animal doctors who fix them. Aside from a couple of roles outside the health sector (including setting up Wellington’s first sushi bar), Janet has had a professional career in health.

She started out in human health at the Ministry of Health, followed by a role as chief executive/registrar of the Dental Council. She was subsequently involved in the development and implementation of the 2003 Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act, which regulated all the human health professions.

A previous shared Dental and Veterinary Council office space, exposure to the work of VCNZ and veterinarians such as Boyd Jones and Roger Marchant, combined with her farming background, led Janet to thinking we were a good bunch of people to work with. In 2007 she jumped at the opportunity of filling in for registrar Julie Haggie while she took parental leave. This became a permanent role in 2008.

VCNZ’s role is to ensure that veterinarians are fit to practise. It delegates



many of its powers to the registrar, such as: approving registration and APC applications; developing, implementing and monitoring policies, systems and processes to meet the Act’s requirements; and managing health-impaired veterinary practitioners. Janet has worked tirelessly to ensure that VCNZ meets all its obligations under the Veterinarians Act 2005, and has built a clear policy framework and a strong cohesive office team to support this.

As CE Janet has overseen a shift in the Council’s *modus operandi* to a governance/management split, with an increased focus on strategic direction, risk management, regular performance reviews and collaboration and engagement with the profession and other major stakeholders. She says that VCNZ is committed to the use of ‘right touch’ and evidence-based regulatory principles to ensure the most consistent, cost-effective, collaborative and proportionate regulation of the profession.

Janet says the veterinary profession has been terrific to work with. “Vets,” she remarks, “are smart, focused, practical, compassionate and so adaptable.” She has had a very strong focus on ensuring that veterinarians are well supported in their work, and that when things go wrong “the default response should be educational”.

Janet was strongly committed to supporting veterinarians when the chips were down and I witnessed on many occasions her concern when veterinarians contacted her to discuss particularly difficult issues (whether these were stress-related, health or personal).

While she is very self-effacing, Janet has had some major achievements, including: developing the CPD framework and the annual workforce survey; working with VCNZ to shift to a governance focus and setting the strategic direction; setting up processes for veterinary performance and health concerns to be managed in a more supportive, collegial and educational way; encouraging a culture of continuing quality and process improvements (for example, online APC renewals); building strong relationships with stakeholders; and providing quality advice to the veterinarians who contact us.

All of this has been done to try to change the perception of VCNZ from something to be feared to a valuable source of advice and support.

On Janet’s watch, VCNZ came to be viewed as exemplifying best-practice regulation and governance by similar Australian and international authorities. I could go on, but my word count limit prevents me.

But there is still work to do. While there have been few negatives during her time, one has to be the Veterinarians Act, which Janet believes impedes VCNZ in effectively carrying out its role in some areas. It needs an overhaul, which was something Janet constantly lobbied the government on during her tenure.

Janet is taking a long summer break before she decides what to do next.

Janet, you will be sadly missed by everyone who has come into contact with you. We wish you the very best. 