



VCNZ Update

VETERINARY COUNCIL
OF NEW ZEALAND
Te Kaunihera Rata Kararehe o Aotearoa

Veterinarians' wellbeing: Role of VCNZ

by Helen Beban, Professional Adviser, Veterinary Council of New Zealand

The role of the Veterinary Council of New Zealand (VCNZ) is "to protect the public interest by ensuring veterinarians are fit and competent to practise". VCNZ knows a significant component of fitness and competence to practise is maintaining good physical and mental health.

If you think you have a health condition (physical or mental) that has the potential to affect how you practise, then you have a duty to let us know. VCNZ takes a supportive and rehabilitative approach where there are health or competence concerns; this is the best way to help veterinarians manage their situation and deliver sound and valued veterinary services to their clients.

VCNZ partners with NZVA to provide resources to veterinarians who need a helping hand.

Vitae provides a 24-hour help line on **0508 664 981**, staffed by professional counsellors providing an independent and confidential service to support veterinarians in times of personal and work problems. All veterinarians have access to three full counselling sessions, free of charge.

The booklet *Vets: Resilience, wellbeing and managing in a complex environment* is another joint project between NZVA and VCNZ. This booklet gives a New Zealand perspective on coping with the stressors of veterinary practice. It includes tips for building resilience and ways to increase your ability to bounce back from the inevitable low times.

What is mental health and wellbeing?

The World Health Organization defines wellbeing as:
A state of wellbeing in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work

productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to her or his community. It is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

Mental health, just like physical health, is not fixed and will change over time often as a result of external influences. We need to look after our mental health just as we do our physical health.

Actions to enhance wellbeing – an evidence-based approach

The report *Five ways to Well-being* by the New Economics Foundation was commissioned by the UK Government's Foresight programme. The objective was to develop a set of evidence-based actions to improve personal wellbeing in UK society.

The following five actions were identified as important for wellbeing.

- 1 **Connect** with people around you, with family, friends, colleagues and neighbours.
- 2 **Be active:** Discover a physical activity you enjoy.
- 3 **Take notice:** Savour the moment and be aware of and appreciate the world around you.
- 4 **Keep learning:** Learning new things makes you more confident as well as being fun.
- 5 **Give:** Do something nice for a friend or neighbour; get involved in your community.

VCNZ contacts

If you have a concern about your health or that of a colleague, please take action to make things better. One of my roles as the new VCNZ Professional Adviser is primary response to veterinarians' health issues. You can call me on **04 894 7109** or talk to Despina Arathimos (Deputy Registrar Operations) on **04 473 9600**. ■

Further reading

NZVA-VCNZ booklet: *Vets: Resilience, wellbeing and managing in a complex environment*
www.vetcouncil.org.nz/documentation/VetsWellbeingBooklet.pdf

New Economics Foundation booklet: *Five ways to Well-being*
www.neweconomics.org/projects/entry/five-ways-to-well-being

Open University free resource: *Journeying through Wellbeing*
<http://tinyurl.com/oz4te6r> This is an excellent free tool (also available as an app on Android or iPhone). It is a user-friendly, fun way to look at mental wellbeing and discusses the "five ways to wellbeing".