

SPVS Origins, and Early History from 1933-1950.

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Early in 1933, a group of some half-a-dozen veterinary surgeons in North Wales were in the habit of meeting from time to time to discuss practice problems. It was from this small group that the Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons - now with 1,300 members - grew over the ensuing 40 years.

The founder member was E P Edwards, and his colleagues were Leonard Jones, John Cane, Charlie Cartwright, R L Lewis and Frank Booth. The group had reached a membership of "unlucky 13" when the Veterinary Practitioners' League was launched at the National Veterinary Medical Association Congress in Llandudno later that same year.

During its first year, the VPL had a somewhat stormy passage. It was accused in the columns of The Veterinary Record of attempting to create "a schism within the body of the National Association". This bogey was effectively laid in January, 1934, when it was proposed that the League should become a Division of the "National".

At the end of the 12 months there were 150 members. During the formative years, first as secretary, and then as president, H W Steele-Bodger worked tirelessly for the organisation with the enthusiasm and humour for which he was renowned.

In spite of its name, membership of the VPL was not restricted to those in practice. Research workers, whole-time officers of local and other authorities, and several professors became members. In fact Sir Frederick Hobday, principal of the Royal Veterinary College, became president in the late 1930's.

The original aims of the association were to unite practitioners scattered within the profession and in the Council of the "National", in order to consider and discuss their special problems, to foster and promote all the practitioners' legitimate interests, and, through the "National", to protect those interests whenever they might be threatened. These original aims remain basically those of the society today. An early example occurred in 1936. In that year the Ministry of Agriculture had intended to extend the scope of the facilities given by its full time officers and thus encroach on the service given by practitioners. Pressure from the society, however, effected the introduction of LVI s.

About twelve months after its formation the name of the association was changed to the Society of Veterinary Practitioners. The present title, The Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons was taken in 1950 due to the new meaning of the description "veterinary practitioner" which was introduced in the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1948.

During the early months of the 1939 to 1945 war, the society organised a series of meetings throughout the country at which the speaker was Professor Dalling who had a most distinguished career at Cambridge University, the Ministry of Agriculture, and later as consultant to the FAO . in his address, Professor Dalling drew attention to the lag that there was between the making of scientific discoveries and their application in the field of practice. Some ideas of the activity at that time may be gathered from the fact that in one week the society arranged meetings in Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Newcastle and Preston and the next week in Bristol and London. As a result of those meetings a resolution was sent to the NVMA from which was born the Scheme to Control Certain Diseases of Dairy Cattle (mastitis, Johnes disease, infertility and the use of S19 vaccine).

The long established practice of nationwide coverage for general meetings continues to this day. During the year 1973/74, *SPVS* meetings are planned in Glasgow, Dublin, Inverness, Salisbury, Cambridge, Swansea, Sussex and Cornwall.

The Society is still actively involved in all matters of interest to those members in practice, but at the present time particular attention is paid to promoting interest in economics and

practice management. In 1957, an Economics Committee was formed. Under the chairmanship of Edward Wilkinson, and with Alasdair Steele-Bodger as secretary, a detailed study of practice economics was undertaken. After a tremendous amount of work, particularly by the secretary, a report was produced in which the following recommendations were made.

General

1. Veterinary fees should be assessed on sound business and ethical lines.
2. A logical system of costing under the headings drugs, distance and time should be employed.
3. Practice costs on both a national and an individual basis should be revised periodically.

Specific

1. The bulk of a practice's profit should be derived from professional fees - not from profit on the sale of drugs.
2. Accounts should be rendered promptly and regularly. Monthly rendering is best, but sending out a third every month is better than the whole every quarter and entails no more work.
3. Book-keeping in the average practice is both costly and time consuming - several modern systems are now available which are eminently adaptable for veterinary practice.
4. Annual audits should be carried out as soon as possible after the close of the financial year so that "current " costs can be obtained.
5. The costing system recommended by the society should be adopted. Fee assessment thus becomes simplified and more flexible to allow adjustments to be made rapidly as and when the occasion arises.
6. Accepting the survey average times for work and travel, the equations shown should be used to calculate the cost of professional time and travel.

These recommendations, with slight modification, are still valid. The full report is of great interest to those in practice today and copies are still available from the author.

Further surveys of practice economics were carried out by SPVS to assist with negotiations for LVI fees in 1969, and another survey has just been completed, a report of which is in the process of preparation. The latest survey was mounted primarily for the preparation of factual evidence to present to the Swann Committee, but its findings cover comparative details of practice profitability, capital invested, return on capital, numbers of professional employees, leisure time of principals and assistants and several other matters of great interest to the whole profession. The report will be made available to members in the coming months.

Another aspect of the society's work is illustrated by the major part it played in explaining the implications and suggesting the mechanics of the implementation of VAT to the veterinary practice. John Gripper spoke at meetings throughout Britain. At the final VAT meeting, at the Churchill Hotel in London, in February 1973, 150 members attended.

John Gripper was also a prime motivator of the SPVS pension and life assurance scheme introduced in 1966 to assist such of its members as desired to provide pensions for qualified assistants and their staffs. The necessary modifications to the scheme are in hand to comply with new pension regulations scheduled to come into operation in 1975. In addition to that scheme SPVS has made special arrangements to provide suitable pension policies for principals and partners in practice.

The success of this scheme has meant that all those who join now receive free life cover of £5,000 under a group accident policy.

The Society is controlled by a council consisting of seven officers and 25 members elected at the annual general meeting. The current practice is to hold three council meetings a year at venues in London.

Members are kept fully informed of council discussion, general meetings and other matters of interest by regular mailings which now include the recently introduced SPVS Bulletin, which has proved very popular.

Among current projects being undertaken on behalf of members are a document to assist practitioners in the computation of goodwill and a book on practice management.

To round off its interests in veterinary practice, SPVS takes interest not only in the affairs of principals and partners but also those of veterinary assistants. A special meeting will be held at Cambridge Veterinary School in January 1974, at which assistants will be encouraged to discuss the problems which they have encountered in practice. With its lively interest and practical involvement in the affairs of the practising veterinary surgeon the Society seems well set for its next 40 years.