

P-05-895 Rosa's Legacy: Introduce a scheme to help people access veterinary care for their companion animals, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 07.10.19

To the Chair and Members of the Petitions Committee of the Welsh Assembly.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide you with this submission in support of the petition that is known as Rosa's legacy. It didn't contain many signatures, that could be a reflection of my involvement in the animal circus issue. But maybe also because even sharing this petition and explaining the background to it would have caused me immense pain.

Background of My Rosa.

I adopted My late Lady Rosa from an animal centre in May 2011. Rosa had been abandoned by her previous owners, who moved house and left her locked inside at the end of 2010 during one of the coldest winters on record in North Wales. She had no access to water or food, she couldn't be fed through the letter box by her rescuers because there was an inner door at the front that prevented this. Alerted by a neighbour who saw her sitting on an inner window sill looking out. North Wales Police gained a warrant of entry and broke in to get Rosa out. She was in the animal centre I adopted her from for six months.

I had always had cats as part of my family, but I was shocked at how much Rosa was affected by her background. It took her over a year to trust me enough to sit on my knee, she was always weary of people's feet and didn't particularly like men near her. But in time she grew to trust me and at home with me she was fine. She would approach visitors to our home for a fuss, so long as I was there too. She was well known in my village for following me if I went for a short walk down to Llyn Nantlle Lake.

But she was always a nervous cat and at the vets her former vet [REDACTED] used the term

"frozen Rosa" whenever she needed to be examined. Which was very apt, Rosa would just cave in inside she was never aggressive, but I was always there talking to her.

Rosa and the way she suffered was the reason I returned to the animal centre I adopted her from as a volunteer until 2015. I suppose she's put me on that road, then followed my campaigning work for animals used in circuses and more, which seemed to become more high profile in recent years.

Veterinary provision for companion animals in Cymru.

I am sure from the regions and people you represent you will know the issues in regard to the challenges people face due to the rural nature of many parts of Cymru, public transport links etc. I also think that the rise in veterinary practices being bought out by corporate companies have hit us harder than other parts of the UK.

Benny my previous cat was insured (my Mam paid for that month by month after I lost Holmes) he received good care from the veterinary practice I used in Caernarfon. Even though he had a multitude of clinical conditions, including a Cardio Myopathy, Diabetes Mellitus (he was insulin dependent) and eventually Hyperthyroidism.

Until 2014 the practice was owned and run by a married couple who are both veterinary surgeons. They sold the practice that year to a company called Independent Vetcare (IVC).

In 2011 IVC owned twenty practices in the UK by 2018 they owned 624 . This is not including the Vets Now practices and three OOH hospitals which the Vets Now brand owned, which IVC bought in February this year.

I naturally took Rosa there from May 2011. When the practise was sold I remember asking one of the Clinical Directors [REDACTED] about this happening. [REDACTED] replied " you will not notice any difference Linda, everything will be the same for Rosa and yourself ". I used that same veterinary practice for sixteen years, I did notice a change in the ethos and ethics. I felt some " up selling" was going on , which I don't consider has any place in small animal practise on animal welfare grounds. Many veterinary surgeons feel the same way too. The turnover of staff started to increase to.

The attached link shows just how few Independently run veterinary practices there are now in Cymru. **1**

Pet insurance.

I tired to get insurance for Rosa without success. Once her FIV+ statues was diagnosed in January 2018 (a test her vets did without my knowledge or consent) there was no chance I would have got insurance for her. As the text of my petition states many owners cannot get insurance for a variety of reasons. Including canines that have been exempted under the breed specific legislation (BSL).

The insurance route sadly is not an option for many different reasons for even the most responsible owners.

Out of hours veterinary provision (OOH)

Up until 2014 in my part of North West Wales only one veterinary practice didn't provide their own OOH cover, the only one that was run by a corporate company. However this picture has changed completely in recent years. Many owners now have to travel to Colwyn Bay to access OOH provision. With an OOH fee starting at £165.50p (depending on the time of the consultation) plus their standard consultation fee of £49.50p are charged.

In June 2014 I gave oral evidence to the Standards Committee of the RCVS on their consultation on out of hours (OOH) provision. Out of 28 other " stakeholders " I was the only member of the public the college called to give oral evidence. In his written evidence Dr James Yeates then the Chief Veterinary Officer of RSPCA England and Wales (now CEO of Cats Protection) stated that at all levels of their organisation (branch and national) it was becoming common practice for vets to refuse to even see an animal and their owner to provide the required " first aid and pain relief " their code of conduct requires them to do .

This consultation came about because of the case of a veterinary surgeon who worked for Vets Now (now owned by IVC) who refused to leave his veterinary practice to treat a dog whose owner had heartbreakingly ran over by mistake on their farm . An online petition started by a veterinary surgeon and numerous calls from those within the profession for further guidance on OOH provision was the context in which this consultation was conducted.

In 2014 I knew OOH provision was increasing being provided by providers like Vets Now. That was why I wanted to give evidence because My Benny and I had received good care at all times from our veterinary practice.

Economic euthanisea.

Section 8:4 of the Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Surgeons as laid out by the RCVS says:

" The Primary purpose of euthanisea is to relieve suffering. The decision to follow this option is based on many factors.....**and the ability of the owner to pay for private treatment " . 2**

I recognise that an FIV+ diagnosis in a feline is a complex issue. FIV basically means that the immune system of a feline is compromised. But there are various stages of this condition. It is widely recognised by many experts and rescues that FIV+ felines can live a long life with the right care and understanding. With My Rosa I felt I was fighting a battle on two fronts her FIV and her vets, who at times wouldn't even try. I could add much more in this regard sadly.

I was shocked at how many times the option of euthanisea was offered to me . It was just added on to the list of options. I do think there is a strong element of " economic euthanisea " being offered to owners these days by veterinary surgeons. I think many people would be shocked to see that the above clause is actually contained within the code of conduct for a VS. To my mind it is contrary to the oath they take and the ethics that they should be promoting. The rise in the corporates companys entering the market in Wales adds to this issue too I feel . I was staggered and still am with hearing so many accounts similar to my own situations when FIV wasn't even in the equation.

Third sector assistance.

As I mentioned in the text of my petition many charity's are struggling with the rise in requests for help. In my part of Wales there is no third sector animal hospitals. While South Wales have several. I have been told the criteria for providing such a service is the number of residents. Which is understandable, but seems to discriminate against those who live in rural areas. My Rosa did benefit from assistance from the PDSA before they had to change the criteria. Which I was extremely grateful for , this situation isn't the fault of the third sector organisations who do sterling work . But provision in Cymru does alter radically in each area.

The Cabinet Secretary's letter .

I was grateful for the response Lesley Griffiths ' AM gave to you . I am very pleased that Lesley and the Welsh Government recognises that such a scheme could be beneficial to owners. I think this also links in with the WG recent statement that they recognise animals as sentient beings.

However I think that the newly formed group CAWGW (companion animal welfare group Wales) would also be a very good group to involve and consult with in this matter . As several members are involved in running rescues and see the issues involved at first hand. I think the rise in companion animals being abandoned and signed over to rescues and the rise in veterinary fees is linked. Many in this field have expressed this opinion to me. So such a scheme would help them too .

Conclusion.

Animal welfare is the responsibility of our Welsh Government and Welsh Assembly, we have made such strides in this area. Such a scheme would be groundbreaking - quite a statement.

I am aware that sharing your home and life with a companion animal is a choice not a right . But such animals bring such richness and for many living in isolated areas they can be the only family their owner has. We also in turn have a responsibility to them as a society, not just as individuals as our former First Minister Carwyn Jones AM said so eloquently.

My Rosa was a treasured member of my family. I would like others to have options that both she and I where not afforded. So some of the fear and anguish I suffered at one of the most difficult times in my life is taken on broad and built upon. For the benefit of other owners and animals who are as equally cherished as My Rosa was.

As ever I would be willing to assist you further as you consider this matter, if you think this would be helpful.

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1. <http://www.independentvets.co.uk/>

2. <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/advice-and-guidance/code-of-professional-conduct-for-veterinary-surgeons/supporting-guidance/euthanasia-of-animals/>

