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that owning a pet and caring for it responsibly can be expensive. It is vital that potential owners think hard about this before taking on an animal.

Vets study for a minimum of five years to earn their degree. Advances in technology and medicine also mean they are able to offer a wider range of treatments than ever before. Some veterinary treatments are expensive because they require highly skilled people and the latest equipment to deliver them.

I don't believe 'upselling' to be common practice and it is certainly not included in the veterinary curriculum. The RCVS requires vets to offer a range of reasonable treatment options and every vet I have ever met has been hard-working, dedicated and focused on providing the right treatment for the pet, given the owner's circumstances.

It is not widely enough known outside of the profession that, particularly since the boom in pet ownership during the pandemic, pressures on veterinary teams, caused by staff shortages, demands and abuse from clients in the consulting room and on social media, and even physical attacks, have driven many to breaking point. Mental health problems are rife, suicide rates are well above the national average and many give up their years of training and leave the profession.

I'm sorry to say that articles like this from well-known people like Chiles could just end up making life harder still for many.

The issue of corporate and independent practice is currently being investigated by the Competition and Markets Authority. We welcome this review and believe it will confirm that his experience is not typical of a hard-working, caring sector that is available 24/7 and run by highly skilled individuals who care deeply about the animals in their care.

Miles Russell, president

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Reference

- 1 Chiles A. What have I learned after three years of dog ownership? Beware of the vet bills. *The Guardian*. <https://bit.ly/3sEGTmH> (accessed 23 November 2023)



“I don't believe 'upselling' to be common practice and it is certainly not included in the veterinary curriculum

PROFESSION

Charging appropriately for professional services

I THINK the editorial regarding the profession's response to the Competition and Markets Authority review is excellent (*VR*, 4/11 November 2023, vol 193, p 339). In particular, paragraphs four and five about how we've undercharged for our skills is spot on. Equally the report from the BVA and allied associations, especially the bullet points, is particularly pertinent (*VR*, 4/11 November 2023, vol 193, p 341).

Of late I've found it difficult to defend current prices (not that I've charged any myself for six years having retired in 2017) but this makes it much more defensible when confronted with a friend's or neighbour's latest horror story regarding fees.

Congratulations to all for the hard work of those involved at the BVA, British Small Animal Veterinary Association, Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons, British Veterinary Nursing Association and Veterinary Management Group for giving a well-reasoned response from our profession, which has had some ill-informed criticism of late.

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Letters are not peer-reviewed, unless stated.

BOVINE TB

Uncertainty in bovine tuberculosis transmission routes

TREVOR Jones makes some broad and erroneous comments on Sarah Tomlinson's recent *In Practice* article¹ on the holistic approach to bovine tuberculosis (bTB) (*VR*, 4/11 November 2023, vol 193, pp 373–374). The article gives reasonable, practical and deliverable advice on the prevention and control of bTB but demonstrates the unfortunate paucity of scientific evidence that should underpin such advice and which is revealed by Jones' letter.

Jones' assertion that orofaecal transmission is of little relevance is outdated. The oral transmission route has been demonstrated in a small but controlled study by Serrano et al² which showed that small doses of *Mycobacterium bovis* given orally produced infections and disease, which interestingly had no visible lesions.

My own unpublished work on one large dairy farm (where the herd was endemically infected despite never grazing outside), showed faecal shedding in 21 per cent of the 158 high-risk cattle that were tested by Warwick University using a well-established, albeit unvalidated, PCR technique. The viability of the detected *M bovis* was confirmed in a small number of samples using culture. Repeat sampling was necessary to detect the shedders, suggesting that shedding is intermittent, or variable beyond the estimated detection limit of 1000 organisms/g. None of these animals was categorised as a reactor under the current single intradermal comparative cervical tuberculin test (SICCT) interpretation rules, and none had lesions at postmortem inspection. This raises the unfortunate question as to whether the statutory programme is culling the right cows.

The epidemiology that we now see in the field does not fit well with the established maxim that the predominant route of bTB transmission is respiratory. It appears that a reservoir of infection has become established in endemically infected

herds, predominately large dairies, where infection survives undetected by the current statutory testing programme, and where infection spreads within the herd, probably by both respiratory and oral transmission. Dissemination from these reservoirs to other susceptible herds can be by a variety of routes, many of which are covered in Tomlinson's article, including faeces and slurry.

Our own unpublished survey data of over 2500 dairy herds shows that more than 5 per cent of them import slurry from other farms and spread it on grazing pastures. Some basic research is required to prove these transmission pathways, but the current limited research funding is mostly directed at the development and use of cattle BCG vaccine, which is still many years away.

The involvement of badgers in this transmission is still unproven. What is known from publicly available Defra figures³ is that in the three counties

which contribute over one-third of all bTB incidents in England, and where badger removal operations have been the most intense for the last five years, the number of herds that had lost their official TB free status in the year to June 2023 actually increased from the previous year. The effect of the mass killing of hundreds of thousands of badgers has been disappointing, to say the least.

Dick Sibley, veterinary surgeon
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References

- 1 Tomlinson S. Holistic approach to bovine tuberculosis – there is more to control than just testing. *In Pract* 2023;45:430–6
- 2 Serrano M, Sevilla IA, Fuertes M, et al. Different lesion distribution in calves orally or intratracheally challenged with *Mycobacterium bovis*: implications for diagnosis. *Vet Res* 2018;49:74
- 3 Defra. Tuberculosis (TB) in cattle in Great Britain. 2023. <https://bit.ly/49Fvgfl> (accessed 22 November 2023)

“It appears that a reservoir of infection has become established in endemically infected herds

DEATH NOTICES

Chambers On 1 November 2023, Ralph Keith Chambers, BVSc, DipAgric, MBA, MRCVS, of Gillingham, Kent. Mr Chambers qualified from Brisbane and was admitted to the register in 1995.

Gale On 23 October 2023, John Brian Gale, BVSc, MRCVS, of Hartlepool, County Durham. Mr Gale qualified from Bristol in 1957.

Wishart On 16 November 2023, David Fergusson Wishart, DVM, BVMS, MRCVS, of Great Bookham, Surrey. Dr Wishart qualified from Glasgow in 1961.

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