

Rabbits matter too

A rabbit owner describes the difficulties she has faced in finding a practice able to care for her rabbits

WHAT CAN HELP YOUR APPROACH

- Do not assume that rabbits are not insured, or that their owners will be unwilling to pay for the most appropriate treatment and care.
- CPD, advice from specialists and/or referral are available, and should be accessed if needed. The Rabbit Welfare Association and Fund has useful resources, including lists of accredited practices and specialists: <https://rabbitwelfare.co.uk>.
- Ensure reception staff are aware of the expertise available within your practice in relation to rabbits and other exotic species, and that this is honestly reflected in the information they provide to current and prospective clients.
- If you are responsible for organising a conference or have a role in undergraduate curriculum planning, consider whether the content available on rabbits is adequate given that they are the third most popular pet in the UK.



I CHOSE to share my home with rabbits as, being a vegan, I wanted companion animals who would be content to live as vegans. I am a member of the Rabbit Welfare Association and Fund (RWF) and have taken time to learn about conditions that affect rabbits. While it is easy to obtain insurance for a rabbit under seven, I have found it relatively difficult to find a vet practice whose staff appear to take rabbits and their owners seriously.

My seven-year-old rabbit started to eat on one side and developed an asymmetric face. I took her to the practice that she was registered with because the receptionist had informed me that they had a vet with a special interest in rabbits. Having waited in a busy dog-filled room for an hour, the vet took one look at my rabbit and proclaimed that it was a species that she did not know anything about. After taking my rabbit away for examination, she told me that the rabbit had a dental abscess. She provided antibiotics and advised me to return with the rabbit if its face was still asymmetric two weeks later. Upon returning, I saw a different vet, who also informed me that she did not know anything about rabbits. I told her that I thought that my rabbit might

have a middle ear infection, as that can cause trigeminal nerve damage resulting in an asymmetric face. The vet looked in the rabbit's ears, and told me to return the rabbit four days later to see a senior vet. The senior vet carried out a dental exam and suggested an *Encephalitozoon cuniculi* fungal infection, despite the rabbit not having clinical signs suggestive of it.

On my suggestion, the vet contacted the RWF's veterinary advisor, by which time the ear infection had spread to my rabbit's temporomandibular joint, resulting in arthritis. My rabbit was then referred many miles away to an exotics vet, where she underwent a bilateral bulla osteotomy. After returning home, she continued to lose weight, struggled to eat and failed to eat caecotrophs. I had to e-mail the referral vet for advice and to seek another local practice whose vet was willing to provide the necessary postoperative care.

I then registered my rabbit with a practice whose admin staff informed me that they had an exotics vet. Their vet suggested that the rabbit's weight loss was due to the antibiotics and discontinued them, without having contacted the referral vet for advice. Shortly afterwards, my rabbit



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DO YOU WANT TO GET INVOLVED?

If you know a client who might be interested in writing for us, please contact us at vet.clientview@bmj.com. Any contributions will be assessed by the column's veterinary coordinator, Zoe Belshaw.

developed gastrointestinal stasis and had to return to hospital. The vet thought my rabbit had an ongoing dental issue.

Having been discharged from hospital a second time, I took the rabbit to another practice that did have a specialist exotics vet, who thought that she was losing weight because of being unable to use her lips, due to bilateral facial paralysis. The specialist vet listened to me, provided advice, reviewed the rabbit's medication and provided further appointments as necessary. The rabbit slowly gained weight after supplementation of her usual diet with recovery food. She now has a new partner who spends much of his day snuggled up to her.

These events occurred during the completion of a Master's degree. My rabbit is a sentient being, thus she is my priority, but the worry and stress associated with having a very poorly rabbit who was not receiving the necessary veterinary care, despite my best efforts, made it difficult to focus.

At present, I do not knowingly live near to a rabbit-friendly vet practice and thus dread one of my furry housemates getting ill as I worry that vet practices may not take rabbits seriously. As a result, despite being a two-hour drive away, my nearest exotics specialist vet is now the only vet I use.