

Editorial

Innovation in a post-Covid 'new normal'

THE proverb 'necessity is the mother of invention' is particularly apt at present. Whether it is Formula 1 teams producing ventilators for the NHS instead of racing cars, distillers making hand sanitiser instead of gin, or fashion houses creating personal protective equipment for healthcare workers instead of haute couture, in the space of a few weeks, businesses have adapted and innovated so they can continue to function in some form while accommodating restrictions imposed to limit the spread of Covid-19.

The veterinary profession has adapted, too. As described by BVA junior vice president James Russell on 10 May in BVA's weekly webinar update on Covid-19, vets have stepped up when it comes to finding new ways of working while respecting social distancing rules. Farm vets have been innovative with animal handling techniques to allow most routine bovine TB testing to continue, emergency surgeries to be conducted and the spring lambing and calving seasons to be completed. Remote video inspections of units have been carried out to ensure confidence in the assurance schemes under which food is produced. There have even been reports of specialist pig vets instructing farmers how to carry out the initial cutting stage of a gross postmortem examination to allow the vet to make a visual assessment of the carcass via video link. Equine vets too have adapted the way they work to ensure horses are handled safely for necessary veterinary procedures.

An RCVS survey conducted in April showed that practices have also embraced teleconsulting, with a majority of the 532 respondents saying they were using remote consultations for existing and new clients. Vets are offering advice and triaging cases from home, and they are prescribing remotely where no alternative is possible. The RCVS is due to publish the results of a second survey shortly and it will be interesting to see what has changed in the past few weeks.

As the restrictions around coronavirus begin to be progressively eased, veterinary teams will have to find further innovative solutions at each stage. The key to successful innovation is to start by clearly defining the problem that needs solving

– and there is certainly no shortage of problems emerging as we look to the future. The current pandemic will continue to drive innovation, and innovation is not just about finding technological solutions, it is also about finding new ways of working.

As Adrian Nelson-Pratt argues on p 540 of this issue, the post-Covid-19 era offers vets 'a free pass' to design a new way of delivering veterinary care and he urges practices to 'put your best team on



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the job immediately'. He poses multiple questions that vet professionals need to consider, from how to create Covid-secure workplaces, to how teams might be restructured and work patterns adapted.

Despite the prime minister setting out his 'first sketch of a roadmap' to easing the lockdown on

10 May, and the publication of a more detailed UK government Covid-19 recovery strategy on 11 May, it is clear that not much is going to change quickly in the UK in the short term. A joint statement issued by the BVA and the RCVS shortly after publication of the recovery strategy indicated there was no immediate need for vets to make major adjustments to their Covid-19-imposed ways of working and the BVA is now developing further advice to help vets interpret the latest government guidance for their own workplaces.

Overall, therefore, getting back to 'normal' life remains a long way off, but two things are clear. First, aspects of the 'old normal' will never return, and second, it is certainly not too soon to start innovating for a 'new normal' after lockdown.

Kathryn Clark

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