

Meaningful work and well-being: a study of the positive side of veterinary work

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Abstract

Objectives Mental health is a growing concern in many healthcare professions, including veterinary medicine, as research suggests that veterinarians report higher levels of distress, burnout and suicidal ideation than other healthcare occupations and the general public. A recent literature review found that about twice as many articles published on veterinary wellness refer to the negative aspects of mental health (eg, stress and depression) compared with the positive aspects of well-being. Little attention has been devoted to examining the positive aspects of veterinarians' work, and few models have been developed to explain their well-being. This paper empirically assesses a veterinary model of work-derived well-being based on the theory of eudaimonia. Eudaimonic well-being reflects having fulfilling work that contributes to the greater good. Three core clusters of job characteristics are hypothesised relevant to veterinarian well-being that include: actualising self, helping others (animals or people) and a sense of belonging (to team or profession). In addition, meaningful work is proposed as the mechanism through which situational job characteristics may exert a positive influence on well-being.

Methods Survey data from 376 veterinarians in clinical practice were analysed using path analysis.

Discussion Meaningful work is important in understanding the well-being of veterinarians. Job characteristics (self-actualising work, helping animals and people and a sense of belonging) contribute to a sense of meaningful work, which in turn is related to eudaimonic well-being. Excessive job demands (work overload, financial demands and physical health risks) appear less relevant in understanding meaningful work but are clearly important in having negative consequences for veterinarians' well-being.

While strategies that cultivate meaningful work may be effective in nurturing veterinarians' well being, several limitations of this study should be noted. First, due to the cross-sectional data, definitive statements about the causal ordering of variables cannot be made. Second, the data were derived from a single source such that monomethod bias may be an issue. Third, the data rely on self-report measures and the responses may be influenced by social desirability or response biases. Lastly, while the sample may be representative of the veterinarians throughout a large geographic area in Canada, it may not represent the work arrangements of veterinarians in other countries.

Conclusions The significance of these findings is that they may shift research attention from focusing on the harmful, demanding aspects of veterinary work to better understanding the deeply meaningful aspects that improve veterinarians' well-being. In addition, the results may stimulate consideration of strategies that move beyond individual-level interventions that focus on veterinarians adopting better coping strategies and becoming more resilient. This may lead to adopting organisational and occupational-level strategies that can involve promoting more positive and supportive workplace cultures and developing more professional resources for promoting wellness and meaning in the profession of veterinary medicine.

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Introduction

To each one of you the practice of medicine will be very much as you make it – to one a worry, a care, a perpetual annoyance; to another, a daily joy and a life of as much happiness and usefulness as can well fall to the lot of man.¹

Osler's early observations about doctors equally apply to veterinarians today.² Mental health is a growing concern

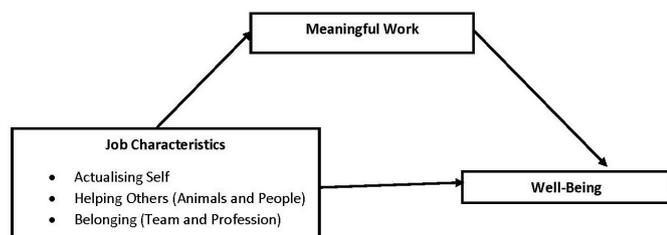


Figure 1 Proposed model of veterinarian well-being.

in many healthcare professions, including veterinary medicine, as research suggests that veterinarians report higher levels of distress, burnout and suicidal ideation than other healthcare occupations and the general public.³⁻⁶ Perhaps ironically, much of this ‘mental health’ research actually tends to focus on ‘mental distress’, which emphasises factors related to burnout, stress, anxiety, depression and suicide.^{7 8} Similarly in the veterinary literature, Cake and others⁹’s review showed ‘problem-oriented mental health terms are used more frequently than resilience or well-being-oriented terms, in a ratio of about 2:1’ (p. 96). They found that about twice as many articles on veterinary wellness referred to the negative aspects of mental health (eg, stress, suicide or depression) compared with positively oriented words such as well-being or resilience.

Notwithstanding these findings, it has been recognised that many healthcare professionals, including veterinarians, are resilient and flourish, despite the long hours, heavy demands and taxing emotional nature of their work.^{2,8} Growing attention is being devoted to better understanding the positive aspects of work-related well-being, but few models have been developed to explain worker variations in well-being.

The purpose of this paper is to operationalise and empirically assess the model of veterinary work-related well-being recently proposed by Cake and others.¹⁰ Based on their review of the literature on sources of job satisfaction for veterinarians, they proposed that the theory of eudaimonia may be a suitable model for better understanding how veterinarians experience well-being from deeply meaningful work.

Eudaimonic model of veterinarian well-being

Cake and others propose a model of work-derived well-being to explain deeply meaningful and satisfying work, and in turn, eudaimonic well-being among veterinarians.¹⁰ They identify three core clusters of job characteristics that are hypothesised relevant to veterinarian well-being. These include: actualising self, helping others (animals or people) and a sense of belonging (to team or profession). In addition, McMahan and Renken¹¹ argue that meaningfulness is central to explaining eudaimonic well-being. That is, meaningful work is the mechanism through which the situational job characteristics may exert a positive influence on well-being. Based on these arguments, this paper hypothesises that the three core clusters of situational

job characteristics may directly relate to veterinarians’ well-being and also indirectly contribute to their well-being through meaningful.¹⁰⁻¹² The proposed model to be tested is presented in [figure 1](#), and the key concepts are described below.

Actualising self refers to meeting and achieving complex challenges that involve using specialised skills and knowledge. Complex challenges may offer a sense of accomplishment as well as the potential for learning and personal growth. Veterinarians, like other professionals, are often highly committed to expertise as a source of identity and meaning.¹³ In a recent study, veterinarians identified challenging work as one of the best things about their work as it offers opportunities to learn and evolve as a veterinarian, to problem solve and help animal patients and human clients.¹⁴

Helping and caring for others is central to the eudaimonic tradition.¹⁰ The idea of ‘making a difference’ in the lives of others is a fundamental feature to many in the helping professions. Bailey and Madden¹⁵ refer to this type of work as self-transcendent, when it matters or benefits more than just oneself. In the case of veterinarians, they provide care to animal patients and to the animals’ owners.¹⁶ Making a difference in the lives of animals as well as building relationships with their owners can be one of the most fulfilling and meaningful parts of practising veterinary medicine.^{17 18}

A sense of belonging to a caregiving team or the profession is also important in understanding well-being. Those who feel connected to others have opportunities to confide and discuss problems, which contributes to a sense of community, trust and belonging.² Clinical veterinary working teams are often close-knit. They work together under emotionally demanding conditions where they share a common underlying passion of helping animals. These teams can take on even more importance for many veterinarians who often have minimal opportunities to regularly interact with the larger veterinary community.^{2 19}

Having a meaningful life is crucial for well-being, as well as other positive psychological outcomes, such as happiness, satisfaction with life and better psychological.¹¹ Meaningful work reflects the degree to which individuals perceive their work as significant and fulfilling a sense of purpose. As indicated above, this study will explore whether the job characteristics of actualising self, helping others and sense of belonging are directly related to veterinarian well-being or whether they indirectly contribute to well-being through meaningful work. To explore this question, survey data from veterinarians in clinical practice, who interact daily with both animal patients and human clients, are analysed. Based on research that has examined veterinarian well-being from the perspectives of stress and burnout, several key job demands as well as potentially relevant individual variables are included

Measure description	Mean (SD)
Well-being was measured by the WHO (Five) Well-Being Index that reflects how often respondents feel: cheerful and in good spirits; calm and relaxed; active and vigorous; fresh and rested; and that their daily life is filled with things that interest them ($\alpha=0.91$). Responses ranged from 'at no time' (coded 1) to 'all of the time' (coded 6). ³²	3.660 (0.991)
Meaningful work was measured by three items adapted from Stamm's Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL version 5) that reflect the extent to which respondents 'strongly agree' (coded 5) or 'strongly disagree' (coded 1) that: they make a difference in the lives of others through their work, they are a 'success' as a veterinarian and they are happy they chose veterinary medicine ($\alpha=0.79$). ³³	3.962 (0.771)
Job characteristics	
Actualising self was measured by seven items that reflect how often respondents' work is: varied and interesting, requires being creative, requires learning new things, is meaningful, lets them use their skills and abilities and lets them do a lot of different things ($\alpha=0.82$). Responses ranged from 'never' (coded 1) to 'most of the time' (coded 5). ^{34,35}	4.159 (0.532)
Helping animals was measured by five items from Ilgen and others' Veterinarian Satisfaction Scale that reflects how often respondents' work allows them to: make a significant contribution to the health and well-being of animals, do good things for animals, be involved with the human-animal bond in a positive way, care for animals in rewarding way and be satisfied from being able to help animals in their work ($\alpha=0.86$). ³⁶ Responses ranged from 'never' (coded 1) to 'most of the time' (coded 5).	4.342 (0.671)
Helping people was measured by three items developed for this study: how often respondents get satisfaction from helping their clients, how often they feel invigorated from working with their clients and how often they are thanked by their clients for caring for their animals ($\alpha=0.73$). Responses ranged from 'never' (coded 1) to 'most of the time' (coded 5).	3.793 (0.665)
Belonging to team was measured by four items that indicate how often respondents feel that their coworkers: listen to others' opinions or ideas; thank one another for the work that they do; give each other positive feedback, guidance or advice; and say or do things that make others feel pride in their work ($\alpha=0.86$). ³⁷ Responses ranged from 'never' (coded 1) to 'most of the time' (coded 5).	3.736 (0.716)
Belonging to profession was measured by four items that measure how often respondents feel that they would: like to continue working in the veterinary profession, definitely become a veterinarian if they were to 'do it over again', not likely to leave the veterinary profession and would not like to work in an occupation other than the veterinary profession ($\alpha=0.88$). Responses ranged from 'never' (coded 1) to 'most of the time' (coded 5). ³⁸	3.876 (0.871)
Job demand control variables	
Work overload was measured by five items that assesses how often participants feel overextended, rushed, do not have enough time, have too many demands or do not have enough time to get everything done ($\alpha=0.91$). ³⁹ Responses ranged from 'never' (coded 1) to 'most of the time' (coded 5).	3.360 (0.875)
Financial concerns was measured by how often respondents have concerns about the financial situation of the clinic. Responses ranged from 'never' (coded 1) to 'most of the time' (coded 5).	2.749 (1.169)
Client interactions was measured by items from Bartram and others' (2009) Veterinarian Clinical Stress scale that indicates how often respondents experience difficult communications with clients, unrealistic client expectations and conflict between client and animal interests ($\alpha=0.75$). Responses ranged from 'never' (coded 1) to 'most of the time' (coded 5). ⁴⁰	2.963 (0.713)
Physical health risks was measured by six items that assess how often respondents are exposed to the following health risks: dangerous equipment, a serious injury, a minor injury, illness, improper posture and improper lifting ($\alpha=0.81$). ⁴⁰ Responses ranged from 'never' (coded 1) to 'most of the time' (coded 5).	2.588 (0.638)
Individual control variables	
Gender (male=1) was coded 1 for men and 0 for women.	28.2%*
Years experience was computed by subtracting the year the respondent started practising veterinary medicine from the year of the survey.	15.619 (10.525)
Income ranges from \$25 000 or less (coded 1) to more than \$200 000 (coded 8). The average income category of 4 represents \$75 001 to \$1 00 000.	4.199 (1.691)
Employment status (full time=1) was coded 1 for full time and 0 for part time.	78.4%*
Type of clinic (small animal=1) was coded 1 for small animal clinics and 0 for mixed and/or large animal clinics.	61.1%*
Position (owner=1) was coded 1 if the respondent was an owner/co-owner and 0 if they were an associate.	36.5%*
Marital status (married=1) was coded 1 if the respondent was cohabitating, common law, married, remarried at the time of the survey and 0 for other.	77.7%*
Parental status (parent=1) was coded 1 for those respondents who had children living at home at the time of the survey and 0 if not.	47.7%*

*The percentage represents the group who fall into the category coded 1.

as control variables. These variables and their measures are described in [table 1](#).

Materials and methods

Survey design

The survey instrument was designed based on a review of existing research on veterinary well-being in combination with information collected from four focus groups and seven online interviews with practising veterinarians. Factors identified in the relevant literature in combination with those from the focus groups and interviews were used to develop the survey instrument. The survey was organised around three core themes: work attitudes and experiences (both positive and negative), coping strategies and well-being. Most of the survey items are from previously established scales (see [table 1](#)). The survey was pilot tested with academic and practising veterinarians familiar with the subject of veterinarian wellness.

Survey distribution and sample

In April 2013, electronic newsletters with a generic invitation to participate in an online, anonymous survey were sent to all 1401 veterinarians registered with the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association. In

total, 537 (38.3 per cent) veterinarians completed the questionnaire. In this paper, the sample was restricted to veterinarians working in veterinary clinics (n=376) as they represent the most common veterinary employment setting. The respondents are from clinics that employ on average 4–5 veterinarians, and the majority (61 per cent) are in small animal practices with the remaining in mixed or large animal practices. Comparisons were made with the provincial membership distributions along three descriptors: employment setting (eg, small animal practice, mixed animal practice, industry and government); gender; and years of experience. Chi-squared tests indicate no significant differences in the distributions between the provincial membership statistics and the sample data along these characteristics (available from author).

Measures

Steps were taken to ensure the reliability and validity of the measures included in the survey. Convergent and discriminant validity of multiple-item scales were assessed using factor analysis. Exploratory factor analysis was carried out to empirically examine the latent structure among the newly developed measures, and confirmatory factor analysis was used to confirm

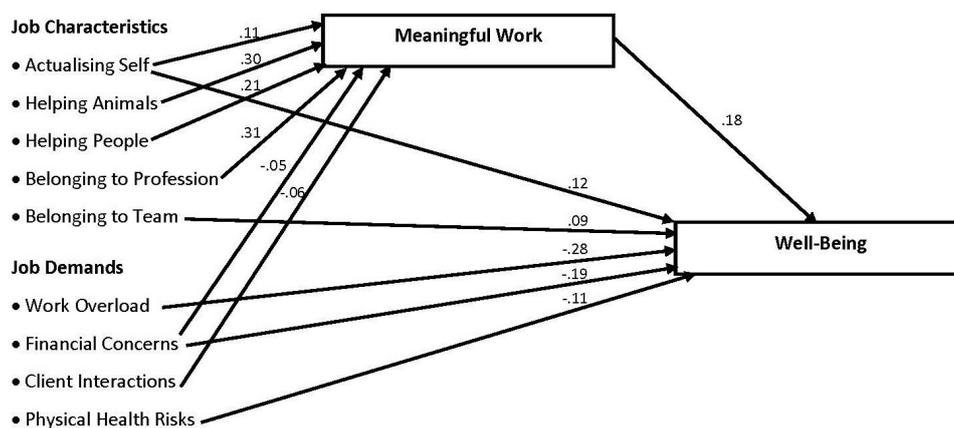


Figure 2 Path analysis results for proposed model of veterinarian well-being. Path analysis results are standardised coefficients for meaningful work and well-being that are significant at the 0.05 level (one-tailed test).

the factor structure of already existing measures (results not shown). Cronbach's alpha (α) was estimated for each scale to assess the internal consistency, or reliability, of scale items. Alphas greater than 0.70 are considered acceptable. Scale scores were calculated as mean scores by summing the items and dividing by the number of items, where a higher score indicates a greater frequency of that variable. Table 1 provides descriptive information on the measures of all variables included in the analysis.

Identification of job demands specifically relevant to veterinarians in clinical practice were derived from several sources.^{20–22} Four variables were included as job demand control variables: work overload, financial

concerns, client interactions and physical health risks. In addition, eight individual characteristics were included as control variables that include: gender, years of experience, income, employment status, type of clinic, position, marital status and parental status.

Statistical analyses

Path analysis was used to determine the extent to which the job characteristic variables are directly related to veterinarian well-being and/or indirectly related to veterinarian well-being via meaningful work. The first regression analysis included meaningful work as the dependent variable and estimated the direct effects of job characteristics as well as the job demand and individual control variables on meaningful work (table 2, column 1). In column 2, the direct effects of job characteristics and the control variables on well-being were estimated. The indirect (column 3) and total effects (column 4) for all of the explanatory variables on well-being via meaningful work were then calculated. Each indirect effect equals the product of the direct effect for that particular variable on well-being and the direct effect of meaningful work on well-being alone.²³ The total effects for each variable on well-being equal the sum of the indirect and direct effects. The results of the path analysis are summarised in figure 2.

Lastly, examination of the zero-order correlations (available from author upon request) demonstrated that there were no multicollinearity problems among the independent variables. Variance inflation factors were also estimated for all variables included in the regression analysis, and the results suggest that multicollinearity is not evident for any of the independent variables.²⁴

Results

Table 1 provides descriptive information and statistics for all of the variables included in the analysis. Table 1 indicates that 28 per cent of the participants are male, most (78 per cent) are married and about half (48 per cent) have children living with them at home. They have, on average, 15 years experience and average \$75 000–\$100 000 annual salaries, although both of these

Table 2 Path analysis results for meaningful work and well-being (n=376)

Variable	Meaningful work Direct (col. 1) β	Well-being Direct (col. 2) β	Well-being Indirect (col. 3) β	Well-being Total (col. 4) β
Job characteristics				
Actualising self	0.110**	0.123*	0.020	0.143
Helping animals	.296***	-0.009	0.053	0.044
Helping people	0.209***	0.052	0.037	0.089
Belonging to team	0.041	0.093*	0.001	0.094
Belonging to profession	0.308***	0.071	0.055	0.126
Job demand control variables				
Work overload	-0.052	-0.282***	-0.009	-0.273
Financial concerns	-0.054*	-0.191***	-0.010	-0.201
Client interactions	-0.064*	-0.039	-0.011	-0.050
Physical health risks	-0.005	-0.112**	-0.001	-0.113
Individual control variables				
Gender (male=1)	0.001	0.067	0.000	0.067
Years experience	0.070*	0.059	0.013	0.072
Income	0.091**	-0.023	0.016	-0.007
Employment status (full time=1)	0.004	0.004	0.001	0.005
Type of clinic (small animal=1)	-0.047	-0.055	-0.008	-0.063
Position (owner=1)	-0.077*	-0.006	-0.014	-0.020
Marital status (married=1)	0.022	0.061	0.004	0.065
Parental status (parent=1)	0.010	0.049	0.002	0.051
Meaningful work	---	0.179**	---	0.179
R ²	0.725	0.471		

*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001 (one-tailed test).

variables vary dramatically. The majority (78 per cent) work full time, where more than half (61 per cent) work in small animal clinics and about one-third (37 per cent) are clinic owners or co-owners.

Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the statistically significant paths from the multiple regression analyses. Table 2 presents the regression results for veterinarians' meaningful work (column 1) and well-being (columns 2, 3 and 4).

According to table 2, column 1, four of the five job characteristics are relevant in understanding the extent to which veterinarians find their work meaningful. Specifically, the more they feel they belong to the profession, the more they help animals and people and the more self-actualisation they experience through their work, the more meaningful they find their work. Whether they feel they belong to their work team is unrelated to a sense of meaning gained from their work.

Two of the job demand variables, financial concerns and client interactions, are negatively associated with meaningful work. That is, veterinarians who are more concerned about the financial situation of their clinic and those who frequently have difficult interactions with clients find their work is less meaningful. Demanding workloads and exposure to physical health risks appear unrelated to the amount of meaning veterinarians experience in their work. Several of the individual control variables are also relevant: veterinarians with more experience or who earn more money report more meaningful work and owners/co-owners of clinics report less meaningful work than associates.

The results in column 2 show which variables are directly related to veterinarians' well-being. First, meaningful work is significantly related to veterinarians' well-being; the more meaningful their work, the better their well-being. When assessing job characteristics, a sense of belonging to the team and self-actualisation both directly relate to well-being. Helping people or animals and feeling a sense of belonging to the profession are not directly related to veterinarians' well-being. Recall that even though these variables are not directly related to well-being, four of the five job characteristics were directly related to meaningful work, which suggests they are indirectly related to well-being.

Three of the job demand control variables are inversely related to veterinarians' well-being. Veterinarians with a more overwhelming workload, more concerns about the financial situation of the clinic and greater physical health risks report poorer well-being. Difficult interactions with clients appear unrelated to their well-being. None of the individual control variables are significantly related to well-being.

The total effects (column 4 of table 2) represent the combined direct and indirect effects of job characteristics and job demand and individual control variables on veterinarians' well-being. The results show that work overload and financial concerns, two of the job demand

variables, have the greatest total effect on veterinarians' well-being. Two job characteristics, self-actualisation and belonging to the profession, are also important in that they enhance veterinarians' well-being.

Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to operationalise and empirically assess a veterinary model of work-derived well-being recently proposed by Cake and others.¹⁰ In doing so, the theory of eudaimonia was offered as a model for better understanding how veterinarians experience well-being from deeply meaningful work. This paper explored whether job characteristics are directly related to veterinarian well-being or whether they indirectly contribute to well-being through meaningful work experiences.

The results suggest that helping animals and people and belonging to the profession are important predictors of meaningful work that are not directly related to well-being. Rather they, in addition to actualising self, contribute to a sense of meaningful work, which in turn is related to well-being. This suggests that enhancing the meaningfulness of veterinary work is an important route through which their work experiences are associated with well-being. The significance of these findings in support of the eudaimonic approach is that they may shift our attention from focusing on reducing the demanding aspects of veterinary work to also considering how to enhance the meaningful aspects of this work in order to improve veterinarians' well-being.

Job demands were included as control variables to ensure that relevant factors were not excluded from the model. An interesting finding is that job demands appear less relevant in understanding meaningful work but are clearly relevant in understanding well-being.

These results offer a first step in helping us to understand what work-related factors contribute positively to veterinarian wellness. Meaningful work is clearly important in understanding the well-being of veterinarians. Little research, however, has explored what people find meaningful about their work and what role employers can play in facilitating conditions conducive to meaningful work experiences.¹⁵

Limitations

Several limitations of this study should be noted. First, due to the cross-sectional data, definitive statements about the causal ordering of variables cannot be made. The causal model presented in this paper, however, was derived from theory and existing research that supports the directions of the hypothesised relationships. Second, the data were derived from a single source such that that monomethod bias may be an issue. Third, the data rely on self-report measures and the responses may be influenced by social desirability or response biases. Lastly, while the sample may be representative of the veterinarians throughout a large geographic area

in Canada, it may not represent the work arrangements of veterinarians in other countries. It should be noted, however, that the abstract nature of the variables (eg, well-being, helping animals and work overload) are constructs that are generally applicable across different veterinary work settings and likely related to one another in similar ways.

Practical recommendations

Based on the results of this study, two practical questions are relevant: (1) how can veterinarians and their clinics cultivate meaningful work? and (2) how can veterinarians and their clinics nurture well-being? Note that these questions refer to both individual *and* clinic strategies. Mental health interventions often target individuals, attempting to improve individuals' resilience and coping strategies.²⁵ While this is an important part of enhancing well-being, exclusive emphasis on individual responses is akin to 'blaming the victim'. That is, individual-focused strategies tend to hold veterinarians responsible for the work-related harm that befalls them and the subsequent psychological suffering they experience.

Recently, it has been suggested that if certain occupational groups have higher stress levels than other occupations, it may be pertinent to consider work-related interventions that target employing organisations and the profession.^{14 26} In a recent meta-analysis, Panagioti and others found that individual interventions such as stress reduction techniques, mindfulness and training in communication yielded small reductions in physician burnout but were more effective in combination with workplace interventions such as reducing workload, rescheduling shifts and enhancing teamwork.²⁵ Considerable attention has been devoted to individual-level interventions in the literature; the recommendations below highlight organisational and occupational strategies to enhance the meaningfulness of veterinary work and veterinarians' well-being.

How can veterinarians and their clinics cultivate meaningful work?

There has been limited published research on interventions to improve work meaningfulness.¹² Research that does exist suggests that meaningful work cannot be forced or managed, and it is 'almost never related to one's employer or manager' (p. 56) [15]. Having said that, employers can create a work environment that promotes meaningful work and encourages staff to thrive. For example, one employer initiated response to cultivating meaningful work may involve employees redesigning their jobs or job crafting strategies. Tims and others²⁷ proposed three different job crafting strategies that are directly relevant to the job characteristics examined in this study.

First, employees may *recraft their perspective about their work* by positively reframing their work so that it is

viewed as more self-actualising (eg, reframing a small task such as animal vaccinations as a more significant one with broader health implications). Second, they may *recraft their work tasks* by taking on different tasks (eg, so they can participate in more tasks that directly help people or animals). Third, they may *recraft the interpersonal relationships* related to performing their work (eg, by working with inspiring members in the clinic or profession).

In cultivating meaningful work through job crafting, veterinarians might identify and share the positive work-related contributions they make to animal welfare, the human-animal bond and broader society, both as individual practitioners and also together as part of a clinic team. This may involve recognising the significance of positive work experiences and the importance of challenging, sad or difficult work tasks that also have significant purpose and meaning (eg, end-of-life care for animals and support for grieving animal owners). It can involve considering a wide range of tasks, some of which may seem more meaningful than others, and recognising how some of these small or tedious tasks can have larger meaning within veterinary practice by adopting a more holistic approach to veterinary care. Veterinarians can work together to develop and communicate the purpose and vision statements of their clinic, which can also offer and promote a shared understanding of the organisation's values and goals and thereby cultivate meaningfulness in one's work.

How can veterinarians and their clinics nurture well-being?

Bartram and others²⁸ proposed preventative, ameliorative and reactive interventions for both individual and employing organisations to improve veterinarians' well-being and mental health. They explicitly referred to workplace culture as part of the solution by improving communication and feedback among colleagues, enhancing supportive working relationships and team work, increasing staff's participation in decision making and supporting wellness programmes.

Other programmes focus on how veterinarians can develop their personal resources in order to enhance their resilience, engagement and well-being and reduce job stress and burnout. For example, Mastenbroek and others²⁹ recently developed a one-year programme for new veterinary professionals that teaches how to cultivate positive beliefs about oneself (eg, optimism, confidence and thoughtfulness) through peer coaching, personal reflection and skill acquisition. Meyer-Parsons and others³⁰ found evidence that the Healer's Art course offered to veterinary students was also successful in connecting students with themselves, their peers and the profession, and these connections are key in enhancing resilience and well-being. Both educators and employers might consider investing in

such programmes in order to create the best working conditions for their employees.

Professional veterinary associations are increasingly aware of the mental health issues faced by their members and many offer useful online resources.³¹ For example, the American Veterinary Medical Association offers online resources including self-assessment tools and recommendations on how and when to seek assistance, as well as information on stress management, setting up wellness programmes and how to care for oneself (see avma.org/wellness). More veterinary associations, colleges, local groups and subspecialties are promoting veterinary wellness conferences, retreats and continuing education workshops, which also offer veterinarians the opportunity to connect and share with peers outside their own clinic. Through participation in these various activities, whether they occur within the clinic or beyond, the vital task of promoting veterinary well-being can be nurtured and promoted throughout the broader veterinary community. Such connections and appreciation for how important it is to care for the well-being of oneself and one's colleagues can be key in recognising and reinforcing the deeply meaningful nature of veterinary work.

Conclusion

Little attention has been devoted to examining the positive work experiences related to veterinarians' well-being. The results of this study offer support for the eudaimonic approach to well-being and suggest that enhancing the meaningfulness of veterinary work is an important route to improving veterinarians' wellness. The significance of these findings is that they may shift attention from the harmful, demanding aspects of veterinary work to the deeply meaningful aspects that may improve veterinarians' well-being.

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Patient consent for publication Not required.

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