

SPVS defends vet fees as reasonable and justified

THE Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons (SPVS) has labelled the recent Which? report about the cost of vet fees, “misleading, at best.”

The society, which represents thousands of vets throughout the UK, explains that the cost variances from practice-to-practice highlighted in the consumer watchdog’s findings are “more complex than they suggest.”

Differences in the type of veterinary practice and its facilities will have a bearing on what fees are charged and costs will also be lower for one treatment and higher for another when comparing two different practices. Regional variations in fees will be present, as with all businesses, as the cost of renting premises, business rates and salary levels will be higher in London and the South East for instance than in the North.

SPVS President Elect, Richard Hillman, who owns five practices in the West Midlands, said: “The report, and all the publicity on top, was misleading on a number of fronts. Firstly it did not take into account that we run businesses that need to be profitable for our staff and to fund all the equipment, medicines and future investment.

“Secondly, veterinary medicine is advancing fast with new improved equipment and better medicines being introduced all the time. These need to pay for themselves and I am sure that owners would not thank us for cutting fees by saving money on equipment and medicine that will enable their pets to recover more successfully from illness or achieve better prognoses.”

He added: “Out of hours care can prove costly but that needs to be weighed up with the fact that staff need to be paid more when operating outside normal practice times, which are usually Monday to Friday from 9am to 6 or 7pm. That’s pure economics. Out of hours vets are responding to emergencies and not more usual cases, so these take more time and are therefore more expensive.

“As businesses, individual practices are not governed by rigid fee structures and I am sure the Consumer’s Association would not want a national fee scale that could be accused of price fixing. The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) governs how vets act professionally but do not get involved in fees as there is a very active free market.”

Facilities will also vary from practice-to-practice which might affect the levels of fee customers are charged. So one practice might have the latest and most accurate ultrasound and Xray facilities while another charges lower fees but will have to send the animal to a veterinary hospital when faced with more difficult diagnoses and treatment.

Vets also tend to be unencumbered by waiting lists for treatments and most practitioners pride themselves on fast response rates.

SPVS President John Hill, who owns a six-vet mixed practice in Northern Ireland, explained: “Cruciate ligaments, for instance, once reported can usually be operated on within a matter of days and often for less than £500. If the owner is paying insurance that cost can usually be absorbed so people have peace of mind knowing that their pet is being treated quickly and that they don’t have to worry about fees.

“Most pet owners know that they are receiving a good service from their vet and will appreciate the fast response times, excellent facilities and friendly service they receive. It’s time to really stop knocking practitioners as they are generally doing a first rate job under often challenging circumstances.”

If they are concerned about vet fees, pet owners can also take advantage of one of the many excellent insurance policies on the market.