

# VET DIARY

## Vet on call

Our columnist Nicola Thompson reveals what a weekend on call can mean for a busy vet

An integral part of being an equine vet is doing out of hours work – being 'on call' to attend emergencies any time of day or night. We do this on a rota basis, in addition to daytime work.

At my practice, we have someone on call from Friday night to Monday morning. This person also works a normal day on Friday and Monday.

Being on call can be stressful as you don't know what's coming. You slightly dread the sound of the phone ringing when you have just sat down with a meal, changed into your pyjamas or started a dog walk.

To give you some insight into 'on call' life, I will describe the first 24 hours of a weekend.

### A colic call-out

If I'm on call for the weekend ahead, I do routine work on the Friday, and aim to finish patient visits by 5pm so I can pick up any late emergency calls.

I also check in with my nurse for the weekend, to find out if I have any in-patient cases to look in on. Colleagues may phone me to provide an update on ongoing cases.

At 6pm, I get a message from our answer service regarding a horse that has colic. I call the owner, get an address and head out.

Luckily, it's not a serious case and the problem settles down after some medication is administered.

I arrange to catch up with the owner later in the evening and

at 9pm, the horse is still settled. I do not need to visit him again.

### A busy morning

Because the previous evening was quiet, I get a good night's sleep. Next morning, my first stop is at our clinic, to meet the nurse and check on the in-patients. They are all post-op cases, who are doing well, and will be discharged later in the day.

Just as I am finished at the clinic, I get a call from the office. Two people want to pick up medications, so I make checks and give authorisation to dispense them.

There is also a lame donkey to visit, so I jump in my car. I treat him for a foot abscess and leave the owner with instructions and pain relief.

I don't have anywhere to go straight away, and stop to walk my dog, who has been sat patiently in my car. I manage to finish the walk without the phone ringing, but as I am heading home to grab lunch, the next call comes in. It's a wound on a leg, around an hour away.

When I'm on my way, I'm called about a horse which is quiet and off her food. I chat



During a quiet time, Nicola takes her dog for a walk



### OUR EXPERT

Nicola Thompson is a qualified vet who works for Wright & Moreton in Cheshire, a member practice of XL Equine. She has ridden since she was a child.



On-call vets have to prioritise cases and attend to emergencies first

to the owner and, as it is not more urgent than the wound, I will go there later.

If it had been a severe colic or other emergency, I would have asked the owner with the wound to wait and given her some basic first aid advice.

Having to ask someone to wait is a difficult part of on being call. But we have to prioritise cases that are most urgent and vets are trained to do this.

Luckily, most owners understand we will give their horse the best possible care, as soon as we can.

### Another lame horse

So, the wound is treated and stitched and I'm on my way to the off-colour pony. I treat her and plan a repeat visit the following day.

Next stop is for lunch. I am miles from home and only have biscuits in the car, so I grab a sandwich to eat in the car.

I'm glad I did, as I'm called out to another lame horse. This one has an infection in his leg and cellulitis.

I return home at 3pm, having left at 8am. I make myself some coffee and do a bit of gardening. At 5pm, the phone rings again – it is an update on the off-colour pony. And that brings me to the end of my first 24 hours on call!

Being on call can be busy, and sometimes stressful, but is rewarding to be able to treat patients and hopefully achieve a good outcome. ■

**Next issue:** Nicola describes how she would deal with a colic case, from the initial phone call to treatment.