

The Guardian Letters – by email

17 November 2023

Dear Sir

What have I learned after three years of dog ownership? Beware of the vet bills

I was sorry to read the article from Adrian Chiles on 15 November and am concerned that he feels he has been subjected to frequent 'upselling' by vets. As President of the Veterinary Management Group, which represents leaders and managers in the veterinary sector and as a long-time director of a large veterinary practice in the South West, I would like to offer some thoughts in response.

- Thanks to the NHS, we are to some extent shielded from the cost of our own healthcare and there is no doubt that owning a pet and caring for it responsibly can be expensive. It is vital that potential owners think hard about this before taking on an animal.
- Vets study for a minimum of five years to earn their degree. Advances in technology and medicine also mean they are able to offer a wider range of treatments than ever before. Some veterinary treatments are expensive because they require highly skilled people and the latest equipment to deliver them.
- I don't believe 'upselling' to be common practice and it is certainly not included in the veterinary curriculum. The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons requires vets to offer a range of reasonable treatment options and every vet I have ever met has been hard-working, dedicated and focused on providing the right treatment for the pet, given the owner's circumstances.
- It is not widely enough known that, particularly since the boom in pet ownership during the pandemic, pressures on veterinary teams, caused by staff shortages, demands and abuse from clients in the consulting room and on social media and even physical attacks have driven many to breaking point. Mental health problems are rife, suicide rates are well above the national average and many give up their years of training and leave the profession. I'm sorry to say that articles like this from well-known people like Adrian Chiles could just end up making life harder still for many.
- The issue of corporate and independent practice is currently being investigated by the Competition and Markets Authority. We welcome this review and believe it will confirm that his experience is not typical of a hard-working, caring sector that is available 24/7 and run by highly skilled individuals who care deeply about the animals in their care.

Yours faithfully



Miles Russell

President of the Veterinary Management Group