

## NH Veterinarians and Impairment

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Model Program for Wellness outlines the components of a program supporting the health and wellness of its members specifically concerning chemical dependency, eating disorders, compassion fatigue, anger management, stress, professional burnout, depression, anxiety disorders and suicide. Your NH Board of Veterinary Medicine and Veterinarian Medical Society has contracted with the NH Professionals Health Program (NHPHP) to provide you help. We evaluate and monitor for these conditions with George Messenger DVM serving on the Board of Directors. The NHPHP is a confidential nonprofit organization, free of charge to all licensed physicians and veterinarians in NH. If in trouble, ask for help now before it is too late.

There is a paucity of published data on veterinary health. The following is a short summation of available data on Vets:

- 1 There is strong anecdotal evidence that veterinarians have the same, or perhaps higher risks for potentially impairing addictive (14%) and psychiatric illnesses (10-15%) as physicians.
- 2 Veterinarians in the UK have around four times the proportion of all deaths certified as suicide than would be expected from the proportion for the general population, and around twice that for other healthcare professionals. Male veterinarians between the ages of 45-64 had a relative risk (RR) of suicide that was 5.62 times higher than the general population and higher than pharmacists (RR, 4.15), dentists (RR, 5.19), or medical practitioners (RR, 2.22). Female veterinarians had the highest relative risk (7.62). Their female physician counterparts had a relative risk (RR 4.54).
- 3 In the UK study, 25.3% of veterinarians screened positive for Anxiety Disorder [2.1 times higher than the general population], 13.6% of veterinarians screened positive for Depression [1.6 times higher than the general population] and 12.3% screened positive for both. Co-morbid anxiety and depression appear to increase risk of suicide. Vets may be more accepting of suicide as an option secondary to their use of euthanasia in practice. 24% of surveyed veterinarians in Alabama reported considering suicide after starting vet school.
- 4 UK vets report “at-risk drinking.” Vets frequently also use opioids, Ketamine and animal tranquilizers such as telazol. It is very easy for veterinarians to hide diversion of controlled substances. Staff tends to turn a blind eye to the actions of the employer.
- 5 The causes:
  - workaholic, high achievers with perfectionist and narcissistic traits
  - high-stress environment from pre-vet to work
  - long hours, high debt
  - poor support, high risk for burnout, all work and no play
  - inability to ask for help
  - isolation
  - concept of humane euthanasia to alleviate suffering
- 6 Success: recovery rates of monitored physicians range from 80-90%  
<https://www.avma.org/ProfessionalDevelopment/Personal/PeerAndWellness/Pages/wellness-model-program.aspx>