

The importance of a paper trail in veterinary employment situations

One of the most simple, avoidable and easy-to-fix mistakes made by employers of all sizes is the absence of a paper trail. Keeping non-clinical records in veterinary practices is of the utmost importance, writes Peter Bishton, Deputy Chief Executive, Veterinary Ireland



One of the major aspects of professional veterinary work is the taking of clinical records. Translating this into other aspects of veterinary business, though, is often another matter. One of the first questions to members contacting Veterinary Ireland HQ about employment law situations is about written notes and/or written documentation between employers and employees. Unfortunately, it is often the case that, even though written contracts and/or terms and conditions may be in place, it is a common occurrence, especially with more long-term employees, that changes to these contracts, or terms and conditions of employment, are agreed and/or undertaken without any requests, clarification or confirmation having been given in writing. There is, therefore, no record of such changes taking place and, should employment concerns ever arise, especially years after the event, at best confusion exists or, at worst, situations can escalate into cases being pursued through the employment law machinery.

Patricia Callan, director of the Small Firms Association (SFA), has recently highlighted the importance of keeping non-clinical records. Her advice is equally important in veterinary practice, as it is in any Irish small business. One of the most simple, avoidable and easy-to-fix mistakes made by employers of all sizes is the absence of a paper trail. Time and time again, employers are faced with situations where the existence of a letter, a signed agreement or an email would instantly resolve an issue. The absence of such written evidence can lead to many problems, whether it be defending a case before a third

party or in clarifying the employer's understanding of a temporary arrangement with an employee. In this day and age, something as simple as an email can help to avoid a serious amount of unrest from developing. There is no quicker way to resolve an issue where cloudy recollections have developed than to produce written clarifications. Sometimes an employer will occasionally receive requests for some sort of alteration to an employee's existing contractual arrangements from a staff member and as a good will gesture will often accommodate the employee's request.

However, problems can arise when such agreements are not captured in writing and are only agreed verbally. Taking a few minutes to draft up an agreement or to write a letter to an employee outlining an agreement can save a considerable amount of wasted time, cost and other potential problems in the future. When managing any issue with an employee, whether it be related to performance, conduct or just an agreement to accommodate a temporary change in working pattern, it is vital to record the details in writing.

Veterinary Ireland, in representing those members who run veterinary practices and engage employees, is an affiliate member of the SFA. Any Veterinary Ireland members who have further questions on this topic, or any other employment law or business query, should contact Veterinary Ireland HQ on 01-457 7976 or email HQ@vetireland.ie

Income protection

Do you look at life through rose-tinted glasses? Imagine not being able to work, as a result of illness or injury. Mary Goodman and Declan Gahan, Veterinary Ireland Financial Services, provide this guide to choosing an income protection policy



What if you were to suffer an accident or long-term illness that prevented you from earning an income and providing for your family's lifestyle?

A period of time out of work could mean real financial hardship. We tend to be overly optimistic about how we would manage if we were unable to work due to illness or injury.

Consider how you would pay these normal household bills without an income:

- Mortgage;
- Utility bills;
- Food;
- Children's education;
- Loan repayments;
- Car;
- Savings;
- Holidays;
- Insurance;
- Hobbies.

Income protection provides you with a replacement income of up to 75% of your income (subject to limits) less the State illness benefit (self-employed people are not entitled to State illness benefit) if you suffer an accident or illness that leaves you unable to earn an income. With

'IT WON'T HAPPEN TO ME'

An estimated 30,000 people are living in the community with disabilities as a result of a stroke (*Friends First*). Approximately 8,000 people live with multiple sclerosis in Ireland, with 250 new cases diagnosed each year. Most people are diagnosed between the ages of 20 and 40, when most are planning families and careers (www.msreadathon.ie).

Sixty-five per cent of income protection claimants were aged 49 years and under (*New Ireland claims statistics 2013*).

good advice you can choose a policy that provides regular income until you return to work or reach retirement age and, if you choose, at a guaranteed premium.

As you focus on recovery, money worries should be the last thing on your mind. Having income protection allows you to concentrate on getting better.

With medical advances, people are more likely to survive serious illnesses treatment but this means people are likely to take prolonged periods out of work for treatment and recovery. This could also have a huge impact on your ability to earn. You may have health insurance in place to cover your medical bills but it is equally important to have a plan that will replace your income while you recover. We all know somebody whose life has been adversely affected by accident or illness.

COST OF COVER

Income protection is a lot more affordable, flexible and accessible than you might think. The cost is determined by your age, occupation, health status and the options you



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choose. Your premiums (subject to limits) also qualify for tax relief of up to 40%.

EXAMPLES OF COST

How much for income protection of €30,000 for a 30-year-old vet with a 26-week waiting time and a guaranteed premium until retirement at 65?

30-year-old vet non-smoker	40-year-old vet non-smoker
Benefit amount: €30,000 to age 65	Benefit amount: €30,000 to age 65
Guaranteed premium: €58.33	Guaranteed premium: €94.32
Net premium: €34.99 (assumes tax relief at 40%)	Net premium: €55.59 (assumes tax relief at 40%)

HOW IMPORTANT IS THE COMPANY'S CLAIMS HISTORY?

The true value of having financial protection in place really hits home when it comes to making a claim. There are so many elements to consider, when it comes to a claim, such as:

- Will your premium be waived once you are claiming or do you have to continue paying at a time when your income is compromised?;
- If you take up a new hobby over the term of the policy that may be deemed hazardous, will that affect your claim?;
- Will your claim be paid in the event that you are unable to take up your own occupation again? If you are a vet that specialises in a specific area and can no longer do that specific job, then it is important that you can put a claim in. Some companies' definitions are general and do not allow for such specialities; and
- How promptly will your claim be paid?

When you are ill even the simple things can be difficult. This is why it so important that the company you choose has a sensitive and personal approach to claims management, and that your expectations of the cover provided and the service given are both met.

TAKE GOOD ADVICE AND MAKE THE RIGHT DECISION

Living well in the future relies on planning well today, and planning well begins with professional, objective advice from a trustworthy source that has integrity and experience.

CHOOSE A POLICY THAT GIVES YOU CHOICE AND SECURITY

Choose how much income you want to protect
How much you need to protect depends on your existing sick-pay arrangements and what level of cover you require.

Choose the type of premium you want to pay, guaranteed or reviewable

Guaranteed premium: This allows you to know in advance how much your premium will be over the full term of the plan.

Reviewable premium: Your premiums will be reviewed at an agreed period throughout the life of the policy.

Choose when you want your payments to start

Remember to incorporate any existing benefits you might have. Many people have an emergency fund to see them through the initial six months of being out of work or their contract may cover them for a period of time. It is after that when you need the cover most. The longer you can afford to wait, the more reasonable your premium becomes.

Choose a plan that offers you regular increases in cover

For an additional premium you can avail of increases in your cover without medical evidence.

Veterinary Ireland Financial Services is a truly independent advisory company that offers you the most suitable solution to match your specific circumstances. Our protection advice service entails long-term planning and periodic reviews to assess the suitability and value of these policies over your lifetime. Ensuring that your financial needs will be taken care of is one of the most important decisions you will ever make.

For further information or advice on income protection, please contact:

- Declan Gahan, Senior Financial Consultant (declan@vetireland.ie/086 777 0283); or
- Mary Goodman, Senior Financial Consultant (mary@vetireland.ie/086 777 0266); or
- Veterinary Ireland Financial Services (finance@vetireland.ie/ 01 457 7987/ www.veterinaryireland.ie).

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