



IRISH SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

SUBMISSION TO THE COMPETITION AUTHORITY

COMPETITION IN THE MARKET FOR VETERINARY SERVICES

Background

The Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ISPCA), the principal animal welfare organisation in Ireland, welcomes the opportunity to put forward its views on competition in the market for veterinary services

From an animal welfare perspective the ISPCA is concerned about the major change over the last number of years whereby many veterinary practices have moved away from large animal practice in order to concentrate solely on companion animals. We have also witnessed significant increases in veterinary costs particularly in routine procedures such as vaccination, neutering and microchipping.

Observations

- **Demand for veterinary medicine, veterinary nursing and specialist veterinary training places in Ireland**

It is clear to the ISPCA that veterinary medicine at both surgeon and nursing level continues to be a popular choice for many school leavers and additional third level institutions such as Athlone IT have introduced veterinary nurse programmes. The ISPCA has noted that many veterinary surgeons qualifying in recent years are female and tend to go into companion as opposed to large animal practice. We recommend that veterinary surgeons and nurses should be encouraged to continue their personal professional development throughout their careers and that the training and support structures should be improved to facilitate this. We consider that it is essential that the veterinary curriculum is broadened to include more emphasis on animal welfare.

- **Developments in the veterinary profession in recent years which have changed the nature of the veterinary services market**

As alluded to in my opening paragraph, the ISPCA is concerned about the major change over the last number of years whereby many veterinary practices have moved away from large animal practice in order to concentrate on companion animals. This has implications, particularly in rural areas, where it is becoming progressively more difficult to obtain twenty-four hour veterinary cover. We have

also witnessed an increase in the number of veterinary practices combining to pool veterinary surgeons for out of hours calls, which results in little or no choice to the consumer. Feedback from our affiliated members across the state has revealed there to be little or no price competition particularly amongst small animal practices in urban areas. Although the increased use of qualified veterinary nurses in practices is to be welcomed; the ISPCA remains concerned that many veterinary surgeons do not employ qualified veterinary nurses and therefore post operative nursing standards fall short of the acceptable level. Veterinary nurses are often poorly paid and their important and vital contributions to veterinary practice are often undervalued.

- **Supply of general and specialist veterinary services in Ireland.**

This is an area of concern to the ISPCA; there is a large variation in the skills of individual veterinary surgeons and in the standards of facilities within practices. There is an urgent requirement for more accessible information for consumers as to the skills and qualifications of individual veterinary surgeons. There should be increased access by consumers to information regarding specialist veterinary practices and their location. In many areas the standard of service varies significantly. Some practices do not have access to an x-ray machine and have little or no provision to hold animals overnight. Some veterinary surgeons still do not have gas anaesthesia and general standards of cleanliness can be low.

- **Regulation of the veterinary profession.**

The ISPCA welcomes the fact that non veterinary professionals now sit on the Veterinary Council, we consider this to be a positive and progressive step. We emphasise the absolute requirement for all veterinary practitioners to have adequate insurance cover.

Summary

There is little doubt that the nature of the veterinary services market has changed in recent years. The public are now conscious of animal welfare issues and with more expendable income they can now, more than ever, afford to avail of veterinary services for their pets.

Should you wish clarification on any point, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned.

Mark Beazley
General Manager
ISPCA

Direct line: 043 25029 E-mail: mark@ispca.ie