



Happy New Year to everyone

For RAMP it is not just the beginning of a year but feels like the beginning of the next step. The recognition in August 2023 by DEFRA of RAMP as an industry regulator marks official acknowledgement that RAMP has regulatory processes in place for Chiropractors, Osteopaths and Physiotherapists working with animals.

The setting of standards and policies to create a robust regulatory process has been the main objective for the RAMP founders and council since inception in 2016. However, the RAMP story began much earlier than that and before we move on to the next chapter it may be interesting for those of you that were not involved to catch up with a little bit of the history and the personalities that have worked together to make RAMP happen.

For many decades attempts were made to gain protection of title for those qualified to treat humans, who had completed post graduate education in the animal sector. These attempts failed and it became clear that no-one in the UK has any powers to stop anyone calling themselves a 'veterinary chiropractor', 'veterinary osteopath' or 'veterinary physiotherapist', ***even if they have zero training!***

RAMP commissioned its own legal enquiry in 2020 which came to the same conclusion. We now have legal advice from 4 different legal teams confirming the opinion.

In other words, RAMP founders had to give up the aim of protection of title for human qualified practitioners only.

Also, no statutory power was transferred from the Chiropractor Act, the Osteopaths Act or the Physiotherapist's Charter into the animal world. This means that whilst in human work, those registrants qualified to treat humans can work as primary carers (i.e. autonomous practitioners within their scope of practice), the Veterinary Surgeons Act required that all MSK work must have referral from the vet.

It was made clear that Veterinary Law was separate and different from that governing human practice.

DEFRA advice.

No initiative to prevent anyone working as a “veterinary chiropractor” or “animal physiotherapist” etc. would be legal. However, they encouraged the aim of helping vets and animal owners find demonstrably competent practitioners. This meant that any attempt to clarify the marketplace had to be inclusive of a wide range of qualifications. This initially produced confusion and anger in well-qualified practitioners and occasionally still does in people new to the concept of regulation versus professional association membership.

Seeds of a solution

In 2009 RAMP founders Sonya Nightingale, Chair of the Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Animal Therapy (ACPAT) and Vav Simon Chair of the McTimoney Chiropractic Association (MCA) Animal Group met along with other industry stakeholders including the late Anthony Pusey who was representing Osteopathy to discuss the confusion within the animal MSK industry.

BEVA called the first working group meeting in June 2012 after which there were ongoing discussions around a solution to the variation of education and professional practice of growing numbers of animal practitioners. This led to confusion in the marketplace with vets and owners unable to distinguish between highly trained and poorly trained practitioners which endangered the reputation of the three professions.

Sonya and Vav were joined by Dustie Houchin, then Chair of the Society of Osteopaths in Animal Practice (SOAP). They realised as three professions with statutory regulation in human care already in place, they had more in common than differences.

Discussions continued until the Review of Minor Procedures Regime commissioned by RCVS and DEFRA concluded there was indeed confusion and until this was clarified there could be no change in the legislation allowing practitioners to work autonomously alongside vets or protection of title as happens in the human healthcare system.

Following the RMPR conclusions in 2015 it became clear that the only possible route forward was a Voluntary Register which became RAMP.

RAMP

On 11th Nov 2016 the first steering group meeting of RAMP occurred.

This set the founder members on a journey of recruiting then ACPAT Chair Kim Sheader and SOAP osteopath Eleanor Andrew to help set standards and create a constitution, Dave Simon and Steve Martin to set up administration processes and vets Andrew Harrison, who had been supporting the group for some time and Mark Lowrie representing the veterinary profession.

RAMP accepted registrants from 2016 which included a grandfathering window for those making their living in animal MSK care and who could evidence professional and clinical standards that met RAMP criteria. This was a huge task and this window closed in 2017.

The Council faced a lot of criticism from some practitioners and groups that thought RAMP was too inclusive and others who thought it too exclusive. There were some awful accusations during this time which most people do not realise. Sonya, being the inaugural President took the brunt of it and at the lowest point received threats of physical violence and legal action, in attempts to shut RAMP down before it began.

DEFRA advised the register must be inclusive and open to practitioners who had both completed training in human care with postgrad animal qualification and to those that trained solely in animal care. That was a founding principle of RAMP from the beginning.

Funding: A huge challenge.

All RAMP founders and council members work voluntarily, in the initial discussion stage the expenses were paid by the three Professional Associations ACPAT, MCA and SOAP. As RAMP became an independent entity it seemed only fair that these expenses were in the form of a loan until the point of the first paid renewal. The ACPAT committee were approached and rightly discussed the allocation of funds with their members. A vote was taken at the 2017 AGM where members approved a seed loan to allow RAMP to pay initial administration costs. This loan was for £4549.69 and was re-paid following the first registration fees collected in Jan 23rd, 2018.

RAMP Council have remained voluntary, with only a small budget for one part time administration officer. Council members receive expenses for travel and when necessary modest accommodation. RAMP receives no external funding and reinvests all the registration fees in administration to maintain the register, legal fees, and marketing of the register to vets, public and potential registrants.

Step 1 completed. Animal MSK care now has regulation.

RAMP then set out on the journey to refine and mature standards and policies. There have been many people involved along the way who have given help and advice using their specific skills. They are too many to mention here but suffice to say in August 2023 DEFRA issued a statement that RAMP is an industry regulator.

Defra see's RAMP as a voluntary industry regulator as there is currently no statutory regulator for activities undertaken by animal musculoskeletal practitioners either in the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 and the Veterinary Surgeons Exemption Order 2015, but it does have provisions in place that mean members are accountable to RAMP in case of malpractice, even if RAMP have no legal powers of enforcement.

Therefore, RAMP practitioners are now accountable to RAMP for their professional conduct, RAMP do the due diligence for vets and the public to signpost responsible practitioners and RAMP provide a body to complain to if animal welfare is compromised.

Can we now use this to clarify the position of the MSK professions and contribute to a truly modern veterinary healthcare system?

Jo Paul MCSP

RAMP President

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