Siobhan Mullan comments: This case centres on the difficulties encountered when best practice changes and some vets adopt newer regimens, while others do not. There is inevitably a lag between the development of a new approach for treatment, its validation as being better than previous treatment options and its widespread adoption as best practice. I know that many people would argue that the lag period is currently far too long, thereby limiting the welfare benefits to be had from better treatments. Where there are financial interests, such as the licensing of a new drug, it could be expected that the pharmaceutical company will try to ensure that the lag period is as short as possible. Where there are no such interests, such as with behavioural or surgical treatments, the route to adoption is less clear. It usually begins with the publication of an experience, although this may be in the form of case reports rather than scientific trials. There is now more pressure from funders on researchers to disseminate their study results widely, and promotion by the RCVS of continuing professional development aims to speed up the use of new, better veterinary practices. However, the benefit of a slow uptake of a new approach is that it is potentially protective, allowing for gradual informal testing in a wider range of circumstances than could be possible in a research trial. The practitioner’s role in achieving the optimum balance is to actively seek out new ideas, engage in discussions with colleagues and be open to changing their practices when sufficient evidence becomes available.

Reference

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Have you faced a dilemma that you would like considered in a future instalment of Everyday Ethics? If so, e-mail a brief outline to inpractice@bva-edit.co.uk. We pay a small honorarium for contributions that are published.