

## STEPHEN BARABAS

**Lives:** 32 Westbere Road, West Hampstead, London NW2 3SR [*in Statement of Persons Nominated for Election*]

### Education:

- Moreton Hall, 1979-1986
- Harrow School, 1986-1991
- University of Glasgow, BSc Zoology / Animal Biology (1995-1997)
- University of Glasgow, BVMS MRCVS, Veterinary Medicine and Surgery (1992-1999)

### Employment:

Dec 2008 - Present 13 years 6 months

I run and own two companies for the veterinary industry.

1. VBS Direct Ltd provides GMP high quality supplements to veterinary practices in the UK. In America they are called Rx Vitamins
2. Animal Oracle is a web development company for veterinary and pharmaceutical companies. We develop and provide IT solutions to improve communications, revenue and marketing of the clients we deal with. Recently launched VetEdit - custom-made Content Management System for veterinary practice, and in-built SMS Texting and Online Vet Shop for increasing compliance and practice revenue.

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/stephen-barabas-23283611/details/experience/>

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/dr-stephen-barabas-3641a4184/>

<https://www.thewebinarvet.com/speaker/stephen-barabas>

### Biography

Stephen Barabas is a graduate of Glasgow University veterinary medicine and zoology faculties. He runs two companies: VBS Direct, providing innovative equipment services to vet surgeons, nurses and physiotherapists, including K-Laser, VPET regenerative medical PRP products, digital surgical technologies and high-grade pet supplements; and a human medical company, K-Laser UK Ltd, that works directly with the NHS, sports franchises and private healthcare using Class IV K-Laser therapy (treating diabetic wounds, acute and chronic musculoskeletal injuries and chronic pain syndromes). He is an Honorary Laser Consultant at St Thomas and Guy's Hospital in London. Previously, he has worked in small and mixed veterinary practice, and as a government vet in Cumbria during the 2001 Foot and Mouth outbreak. He was a technical director for a pet supplement company, and Schering Plough, both within the UK, USA and Internationally. He was a past President of Central Vet Society and London Regional Representative on the British Vet Association for 6 years.

### Vet Record Careers: 2011 interview – Stephen Barabas

<https://www.vetrecordjobs.com/myvetfuture/article/enjoying-diverse-veterinary-career/>

I loved the natural world, came from a medical background, and always dreamed of becoming a vet. There was really no plan B. I was not the most intelligent person in my class but, having been told I would never get the exam results by those who were meant to inspire me, I worked damned hard to prove them wrong. My teachers almost had the last laugh, when I only got one A and two Bs at A-level, but a remarking of my chemistry paper saw it regraded to A standard and I gained a deferred entrance to Glasgow vet school.

### Gap year in Hungary

I was fortunate enough to spend a gap year working in Hungary during the immediate post-communist period. I worked as a stable boy at an agricultural university and then at a Lipizzaner stud farm. It was hard graft, but I enjoyed the practical work after years of academic study, and the novelty of working in a foreign country where my father and uncle grew up in the post-Second World War era.

### **Vet school in Glasgow**

Not all decisions in life are self-made; a lot resides around luck and how you use it for your benefit. Glasgow university vet school was extremely good for me in the 1990s. Professor Wright, the dean of the faculty, encouraged veterinary students to look beyond the environs of the vet school. As an undergraduate, I visited many parts of the UK, but also spent a term and a half at the Maison Alfort Veterinary School, Paris, on an Erasmus scholarship.

**"Not all decisions in life are self-made; a lot resides around luck and how you use it for your benefit"**

In addition, Professor Wright helped me to gain a Wellcome Scholarship to do a two-year intercalated degree in zoology. My time at Glasgow made me appreciate the huge contribution academia and core scientific research make to society in improving the lives of humans, wildlife and domesticated animals, and the diversity of opportunities that a veterinary degree can provide.

### **First job**

My first job was as diverse a veterinary position as is possible in this time of specialisation. Working on the Chester/Welsh border, I spent my time working with high-yielding dairy herds, small animal medical and surgical cases, and visits to Chester zoo, with a sprinkling of exotic referrals. I was in seventh heaven, and had a good exposure to all aspects of society and veterinary medicine.

### **Foot-and-mouth disease - front line vet**

Later, I had hoped to move out to Australia to work as a vet, but the FMD epidemic of 2001 prevented that. I worked through the worst months of the disease in Cumbria as a front line vet, and was exposed to politics and working as a team, dealing with complex emotional, unpredictable scenarios with farmers, the general public, the media and government interests often at odds with one another. I learned the skills of diplomacy and empathy, attempting to follow higher orders, but being flexible enough to adapt to situations at the 'coalface' as they unfolded. Seeing a farmer disappear to get his shotgun after I diagnosed FMD on his farm will stay with me for the rest of my life.

By December 2001, it was clear that we had finally won the battle, so I decided to offer my services to help local veterinary practices and their farmers recover from the aftermath. As well as assisting in mixed practice veterinary duties as a locum for several Cumbrian practices, I also acted as a middle man in arranging the correct licences to get land restocked and get life back to normal. I knew the farmers and the Defra vets who enforced the rules, so I made sure things happened rapidly and efficiently, to reduce the stress and anxiety for the farmers and vets involved, who had suffered enough.

### **Experience in industry**

In 2002, I was approached by [VetPlus](#) to be its first technical manager. The company was hugely ambitious, and after working for Defra, I felt prepared to work in industry. The two years I spent with the company was an exciting time. We saw huge growth and became market leaders in the UK nutraceutical veterinary field. Working for a small company requires many different hats to be worn simultaneously and, while exciting, it can be quite unnerving.

**"After working for Defra, I felt prepared to work in industry"**

It is fun setting up trials, writing new literature and giving lectures all over the world, but the commercial aspects are often difficult to comprehend. It is hard for vets coming from general practice on two levels. The first is the timescale differences. In industry, most decisions and projects take months or years of planning and execution, whereas in practice you deal with what is in front of you during the day and usually have it completed by the end of the day. The second involves the

monetary ethical dilemmas. Veterinary school did not prepare me well for the financial and commercial aspects of life, and in industry 'turnover is vanity, profit is sanity'. It is hard to be overruled not because you are not right, but because other ways are more profitable. You must choose your battles carefully, especially when others are against you or your vision, but ethically you have to keep your integrity intact. Raw facts speak volumes, but often it is hard to get everything necessary to make a perfect pitch. Having a grasp of the financial implications and cost of things will increase your ability to add value to the team and your progression.

During this period I sat and passed a Masters in business administration, and felt lucky to have been given wide exposure to the commercial aspects of the veterinary industry.

However, we work in a very small fish-bowl. Doing jobs well with integrity and honesty gets noticed. I was head-hunted by several companies and decided to join Schering-Plough Animal Health, due to the inspiring leaders of its UK team, and the potential opportunities of working for a multinational corporate company. I was not disappointed. I had wonderful mentors and was given a significant budget to spend on increasing awareness of the company's portfolio of products and invest in new residents at academic institutes around the country to help them further their careers. I was transferred to North America to help its companion animal technical team, and saw the investment in research and marketing on a global scale, and the huge sums of money spent on manufacturing vaccines and pharmaceuticals.

### **Setting up in business**

In late 2008, I returned to the UK to marry the love of my life. I had to rebuild my career, so I began to look for new opportunities. In North America I had witnessed the benefits to veterinary practices of well-designed websites and using new communication technologies with their customer base.

Thus, in 2009, with a business partner skilled in high-level coding and web development, we set up a company called Animal Oracle. This company aims to ensure that veterinary practices have high-quality, custom-made websites that are built to improve vet/animal owner communication, health care and revenues using the internet and SMS text messaging. We developed a content management system called "[VetEdit](#)" that allows vets and nurses to control their own websites, and not be held hostage to the high fees that some IT companies charge.

At this year's BSAVA congress in April, we launched the first in-built vet practice internet retail shop. Custom-made for each veterinary practice, it allows vets to choose from over 5000 products and set their mark-up and free delivery point. This online 'vet shop' allows delivery of products from each practice's shop to any postcode in the UK and Europe, allowing practices to gain more revenue and customer focus than was previously possible. My aim is to help veterinary practitioners and nurses during difficult economic times to embrace the new technologies, internet and telecommunications modalities to help them achieve more revenue streams and service to their customers.

### **Giving something back**

Running my own company has allowed me the luxury recently of being able to give some time back to the profession. I am treasurer of the Central Veterinary Society and the regional representative for London on BVA Council. I hope that through my contacts and knowledge I can help vets in the London area and serve them to the best of my abilities.

My advice for any veterinary student or new graduate is to never stop looking for opportunities around you. Vets have a very special degree and understanding of the world, animals and people within it. Whether working in a small animal practice, researching a new drug, studying parasites in the Serengeti or sitting on a government public health committee, as a veterinary surgeon you can offer something to society that few other people in this world can. Opportunities will always open themselves up for you if you are willing to take the chance. Enjoy the ride.