

Call the midwife... no I mean the vet?

“Why is it that the one ewe with the most complicated lambing decides to lamb at 2am on Saturday, when you are already knackered after two other tricky lambings?” I asked myself at 2am one Saturday.

The glib answer of course is “It’s a sheep, of course it will do that”.

Then I think: it’s the weekend*... It’s the middle of the night... I don’t want to wake the vet up... It will be a huge bill.

So, I leave it for a while and have another feel and see if I can do something about it at 3am. Come 3am nothing has happened... oh well, I will leave it till 5am at least the sun will be rising, I might have had a bit more sleep and if I can’t do anything to help then it won’t be too early for the vet. Besides like me she must be at work by 5am or 6am at the latest so at least I won’t have that out of hours charge...

Inevitably it all goes wrong. The vet comes out, the lamb(s) is/are dead, the ewe is knackered, needs 5 different medicines and then decides to die three days later and you end up with a dead lamb and dead ewe to dispose of and a large vet’s bill in a month’s time.

So where did it all go wrong. It was thinking right at the start about the vet’s sleep and the vet’s bill, rather than the ewe and the bigger picture of a happy ewe and a lovely set of twins that win rosettes and sell for lots of money that could offset the vet’s bill. Early and prompt intervention should save lives and hopefully money.

Yes, the vet will cost more – the out of hours call out charge is typically about 30% more than the normal emergency call out fee. But early support from the vet will give a much better chance that the ewe will survive and a reasonable chance that the lamb(s) will be okay too. You also have the added benefit of handing the stress over to the vet, your lambing hand is kept fresh for another hopefully simpler lambing and you might get a bit more sleep. The other consideration is that the vet should be equipped to do a Caesar which might be less stressful for ewe and lambs and more economical than an hour of wrestling.

Does this dilemma resonate with you? Then do have chat with your vet’s practice about their thinking, their hours and fees.

Typically, vet’s normal hours are 8.30 to 5.30. The extra cost of a vet’s out of hours fees are not likely to be that much more than the cost of disposing of a dead ewe. And away with too much sympathy for the vet’s sleep – yes, they may be a bit grumpy and it would be wise to offer them some tea/coffee when they arrive but if they are on-call, they are on-call, and they and you will get far greater satisfaction with a live result than tackling a forlorn hope with DEATH(s) at the end of it all.

*Actually Friday and Saturday nights are not so bad for the vet as they usually catch up on sleep the following days. Sunday and other days of the week are more of a challenge as they then often have to work their normal day.

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