

Companionien

ASAV MEMBERS' MAGAZINE | Q3 2022

FEATURED MEMBER:

Marlena Lopez

"I think that social media is a really powerful tool that can help vets and organisations within the animal community connect with local pet owner populations, but it's also a great way to – hopefully – encourage, inspire, and help the next generation as well."

What happened at the ASAV Annual Conference?

Little miracles – Q&A with Kirsty Nalvarte on RSPCA Queensland's transformative cat rehab program

Helping wombats through mite-y tough times

Plus

Our accredited hospitals
New immunotherapy to help dogs fighting lung cancer
Could catnip have a hidden benefit?
No fake mews!

 AUSTRALIAN
SMALL ANIMAL
VETERINARIANS

Spread the word!

Elanco

Neptra can be used **first-line** for **everyday** otitis externa cases.

Just
one
dose



Convenience **and** compliance - just got easier.



Anti-bacterial
(Florfenicol)



Anti-inflammatory
(Mometasone furoate)



Anti-fungal
(Terbinafine hydrochloride)

NEPTRA[®]



Best clinical practice is to identify causative organism by cytology or culture and sensitivity before, or as soon as possible after treatment is commenced. For single application treatment of otitis externa in dogs associated with susceptible strains of yeast (*Malassezia pachydermatis*) and bacteria (*S. pseudintermedius*, *S. canis*, *E. coli* and *Proteus* spp). © 2021 Elanco or its affiliates. Elanco Australasia Pty Ltd (ABN 64 076 745 198), Level 3, 7 Eden Park Drive, Macquarie Park NSW 2113. All trade marks are the property of their respective owners. For further information contact: 1800 678 368 from anywhere in Australia Monday to Friday or email enquiries_au@elancoah.com. ELAN0146 11/21. PM-AU-21-0854.



From the President **4**

From the Editor **6**

News in Brief **8**

ASAV Happenings **10**

Featured member – Marlana Lopez **12**

A day in the life of Marlana Lopez **17**

Cat rehab! Q&A with Kirsty Nalvarte **18**

2022 ASAV Annual Conference wrap-up **23**

Pushing through the challenges to help wombats **28**

Accredited hospitals –
Eltham Central Veterinary Hospital **30**

Happy ending – Buddy the brave community cat **34**

contents

THE ASAV EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President

David Lee

Northern Representative

Bruce Mackay

Eastern Representative

David Lee

Southern Representative

Bruce Parry

Western Representative

Leon Warne

General committee members

Karen Jackson

Stephen Yeomans

Julia Crawford

Louisa Poutsma

Alistair Webb (ASAV Nominee to the AVA Board)

Recent Graduate Representative

Marlena Lopez

Publisher

The Australian Veterinary Association Ltd

Suite 40, 6 Herbert Street

St Leonards NSW 2065

Telephone: +61 2 9431 5000

www.ava.com.au/asav

Editor

Heather Vaile

wordycause@hotmail.com

ASAV Office

Executive Officer – Elaine Robertson

elaine.robertson@ava.com.au

Advertising - Linda North

linda.north@ava.com.au

Design & Production

Southern Design

www.southerndesign.com.au

Printing & Distribution

Ligare Pty Ltd

www.ligare.com.au

Editorial Material

Editorial contributions from members and other interested readers are welcome, and should be emailed to the Executive Officer. The Publisher does not hold itself responsible for editorial or advertising material in *Companion*. Unless stated, material in *Companion* does not reflect the endorsement or opinion of the AVA or ASAV. Advertisers are responsible for complying with the Trade Practices Act and amendments.



AUSTRALIAN
SMALL ANIMAL
VETERINARIANS

ASAV is a special interest group of The
Australian Veterinary Association Ltd
(AVA)

From the PRESIDENT



DAVID
Lee

WELCOME TO THE THIRD EDITION OF *COMPANION* FOR 2022. IT HAS ONLY BEEN A LITTLE OVER A MONTH SINCE THE CURTAINS CAME DOWN AFTER A VERY SUCCESSFUL ASAV ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN DARWIN, OUR FIRST FACE-TO-FACE CONFERENCE IN THREE YEARS. IT REALLY DID PROVE TO BE A GREAT EVENT – THE WHOLE WEEK WAS A CELEBRATION FOR OUR PROFESSION, AND BOY, DID DARWIN DELIVER! IT WAS A PRIVILEGE TO HAVE BEEN A PART OF IT, AND WITHOUT A DOUBT, FOR ALL THE AVA STAFF, VOLUNTEERS AND DELEGATES INVOLVED, IT WILL CONTINUE TO LIVE LONG IN OUR MEMORIES. I HAVE INCLUDED A COMPREHENSIVE CONFERENCE WRAP-UP IN THIS EDITION OF THE MAGAZINE FOR

ANYONE WHO WASN'T ABLE TO MAKE IT THIS YEAR – OR THOSE WHO JUST WANT TO REMINISCE!

The conference, in a sense, coincides with the so-called beginning of the 'ASAV new year', where we review the work done for the past 12 months, and then reset our priorities for the year ahead. It is also a time when some of our committee member positions come up for review, and for some, their terms come to an end. This year, we farewelled three incredible vets who have come to the end of their terms on the committee. Drs David Neck, Geeta Saini and Zach Lederhose have all stepped down from their committee roles. They are all very well known in our profession for what they have given to our executive and the wider veterinary community, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them again for their contributions; they will be very sorely missed.

But as one chapter closes, another begins. Three new committee members joined us from July this year. We warmly welcome Dr Leon Warne, a specialist in veterinary anaesthesia and an experienced lecturer in the higher education and research sectors, as he replaces David Neck in the Western Representative role. We also say a big hello to Dr Louisa Poutsma from Northern NSW, who joins us as a general committee member, replacing Geeta Saini. Louisa brings a wealth of AVA experience to the

role, having already spent nine years with the NSW Division, and given generously of her time to actively mentor young vets. And we are excited to introduce Dr Marlena Lopez, who is taking over from Zach Lederhose as the Recent Graduate Representative. Marlena is based in Melbourne and has been a strong supporter of the ASAV since her veterinary student days. She is well positioned to be able to assist us in developing stronger bonds with our students and recent graduate members. She is also our featured member for this edition; read on to learn more about this very dynamic new member of our committee.

Before the conference proper, the committee also spent two days on strategic planning for our group which included some time reviewing our Statement of Purpose. Given all the challenges our people have faced throughout the pandemic, we felt that it was prudent that our Statement of Purpose more strongly reflects our commitment to our 'people'. Therefore, we have added the word 'community' into our previous statement, to emphasise the importance of what we work for and who we work for. We are all aligned in stating: "The purpose of the ASAV is to provide leadership, direction and community in promoting the advancement of small animal practice".

As always, we will continue to work with all of you to make sure that we are the relevant voice for our members, and strive to support you as best as we possibly can.





Made by vets for pets



Vets Choice insurance for pets

Born out of a commitment to Australian vets and the veterinary profession, Vets Choice insurance for pets is the product of more than 25 years of partnership between Guild Insurance and the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA).

Since the beginning, Vets Choice was developed with the AVA to ensure pet owners have access to pet insurance that's created by vets for pets. Every aspect of our policy is informed and shaped by the input of

hundreds of Australian vets like you, to make sure it covers the accidents and illnesses that real pets face.

We understand that your four-legged patients deserve to be protected for what happens to them, rather than what a business chooses to cover. That's why Vets Choice offers no gap-payment, lifetime cover and the option for pre-approval.

Help more Australian pets receive the care they deserve and become a Vets Choice insurance for pets partner by emailing vetschoice@guildinsurance.com.au or calling **1800 999 738** today.



Insurance issued by Guild Insurance Limited ABN 55 004 538 863, AFS Licence No. 233791 and subject to terms, conditions and exclusions. This information is of a general nature. Guild insurance supports the AVA's through the payment of referral fees. Please refer to the Policy Disclosure Statement (PDS) and Target Market Determination (TMD) available at guildinsurance.com.au/docs to see if this product is right for you. For more information call **1800 810 213**. PET180086 Vets Choice - Full page advertisements (Vet) 092021

From the

EDITOR



**HEATHER
Vaile**

HELLO AND WELCOME TO THE LATEST EDITION OF COMPANION MAGAZINE.

Now that the weather is warming up again and the rain has finally given way to blue skies and sunshine, I'm feeling more optimistic about the future again. Everywhere I look in the Blue Mountains of NSW where I live, there is evidence of re-birth and re-growth in nature which reminds me that better days are never really too far away.

Our featured member for this issue is a vivacious young vet from Melbourne called Marlena Lopez. You may have already

come across Marlena at various ASAV or AVA conferences, or perhaps even spotted her on Instagram, where she has amassed a following of over 70K followers to her **veterinary_adventures** page. Not bad for a young practitioner who is juggling the demands of a full-time job at RSPCA Victoria and volunteering with Pets in the Park as well!

As David mentioned in his president's letter, Marlena has recently joined the ASAV Executive Committee as the Recent Graduate Representative and she is sure to be a strong voice advocating for her generation of vets who have entered the workforce at a particularly challenging time in the profession. Marlena is a very compassionate and impressive young woman and you can read her story on pages 12-17 of this issue.

This edition also includes a wrap-up of the ASAV Annual Conference for 2022 which was, by all accounts, a roaring success! The Darwin event was not only the perfect opportunity for delegates to enjoy some high quality CPD, but also a relaxed and friendly occasion where people could let go of a thousand work and pandemic stresses in the company of like-minded friends and colleagues. Turn to pages 23-26 to catch up on some of the highlights.

Another article we are very pleased to bring you in this issue is our Q&A with Kirsty Nalvarte from RSPCA Queensland. Kirsty is the head of behaviour for the non-profit organisation in 'The Sunshine State', and she tells us all about their very successful rehab program for cats who need a bit of extra help coping with being in a shelter environment. I hope you'll enjoy reading about the great work they're doing to help vulnerable cats transition to a better future – and love the photos in this story as much as we do!

We've also got lots of good news stories lined up for you in this issue, so, please be sure to check out our 'News in Brief' pages and our article about the women lending a helping hand to bare-nosed wombats in the Central West of NSW.

Australia's wildlife carers and volunteers deserve far more recognition for the important work that they do, particularly in times such as these, when months of unfavourable weather, tough economic circumstances and ongoing pandemic disruptions must make things even harder for them to achieve their goals. So let me finish on a high note by saying three cheers for the quiet achievers of the country!





Otic Cytology: Your Secret Weapon Against OE

In clinical practice, cytology can efficiently provide us with diagnostic and treatment pathways for even the most brain-busting cases. Cytology is particularly useful in ear cases, offering clarity in both monitoring progress and assessing resolution. As a readily available tool that is quick, cheap, and yields instant results, cytology is an ideal in-house first line of screening.

Otitis externa (OE) is a complex disease with various possible underlying causes. When done correctly, cytology gives strong indications as to what organisms are at play with a dog's OE. By exploring the cause as well as treating the symptoms, you can save time, pain, and money for your patient and client. The combination of cytology and topical ear treatments like Neptra is vital for the effective treatment of OE.

Why we need cytology

Cytology should be the first diagnostic test on your agenda. Omitting this simple and fast tool is "like treating a fracture without an x-ray", as Dr Celine Darmon, Veterinary Specialist in Dermatology says. OE is one of the most common illnesses presented in small animal practice, affecting up to 20% of our canine patients¹. Cytology is a pivotal early step in diagnosing OE in our head-shaking patients, not to mention that becoming a cytology wizard will complement your overall veterinary skills and business.

Ear exam cheat sheet

Warn the owner. Let them know this may be painful for their pet, and to prep accordingly (if they need to muzzle their pooch).

Examine the less irritated ear first. This makes the process smoother and helps with comparisons.

The magic method: First, visualise the external ear canal with an otoscope – look for foreign bodies, ear mites and polyps and check if the tympanic membrane is intact. With the otoscope in your dominant hand, gently insert the speculum in a downward direction into the vertical ear canal and slowly advance whilst watching through the otoscope – this ensures that you don't push into the side wall of the canal and cause more pain. Once you reach the 90° bend, gently lift the ear pinnae to straighten the bend, and turn the corner.

Things to look out for: Redness, odours (bacteria vs. yeast), discharge, canal stenosis, foreign bodies, ear mites (*Otodectes cynotis*), ulceration, polyps and the degree of erythema.

Clean as you go. Got a blockage from wax or discharge? Remove your speculum and clean it before proceeding.

Sometimes sedation is necessary. If your patient is struggling with pain, putting them under can help you clean and examine the ear properly, while minimising distress and discomfort for both pet and pet parent.

Courtesy is key. Thoroughly clean your equipment inside and out after use. Return everything to its rightful place and place the otoscope handle on charge (if applicable).

Your best bet

Neptra's™ unique formulation makes it the perfect choice for the most commonly found pathogens in mixed infections consisting of cocci bacteria and fungal organisms. If you're in doubt about your cytology findings, Neptra offers excellent broad spectrum treatment for acute OE cases. Always read and follow label directions.

Neptra is not recommended in cases with rod-shaped bacteria present on cytology sample, as these may represent gram negative *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*. This product should NOT be used in dogs with perforated/ruptured tympanic membranes. Culture and sensitivity testing should be performed when appropriate to determine susceptibility of the causative organism(s). Empirical therapy may be instituted before susceptibility results are known, however once results become available, the antimicrobial treatment should be adjusted accordingly. Not for use in cats

For further information contact: 1800 995 709 from anywhere in Australia Monday to Friday or email productsupportau@elancoah.com.

Neptra and the Elanco diagonal bar logo are trademarks of Elanco or its affiliates. PM-AU-22-0308

Just one dose

Spread the word!
Neptra can be used **first-line** for everyday otitis externa cases.

Anti-bacterial Anti-inflammatory Anti-fungal

Always read and follow label directions.

NEPTRA™

Elanco

¹Ref: Campbell. Dos and don'ts of Canine Otitis Externa, June 2021.

IN BRIEF

News from the small animal world



Photo courtesy of SA Health

DETECTOR DOGS TAKE THE LEAD IN SNIFFING OUT COVID AT ADELAIDE HOSPITAL

The pandemic has created a never-ending demand for COVID-19 lab tests, but here's one with a difference!

Four Labrador detector dogs have been the stars of a pilot study which ran over the winter at Lyell McEwin Hospital in Adelaide's northern suburbs.

The dogs, along with their SA Pathology handlers, were stationed at the Emergency Department of the hospital where they were tasked with identifying COVID-positive visitors as they enter the hospital.

They worked in pairs with two dogs on-site at a time. Each canine had the capacity to inspect up to 100 people an hour.

Patients and visitors had the opportunity to be screened by dogs as part of the existing COVID-19 testing process already in place as part of triage at the Emergency Department.

"Accurate early detection is where the true benefit lies in this study, as people can be infectious before showing any symptoms of COVID-19 and can unwittingly spread the virus," said Pathology Clinical Services Director Dr Sophia Otto.

"The dogs have a remarkable ability to detect the scent of viral infection before an individual develops symptoms or spreads the virus.

"Our SA Pathology medical detector dog handlers underwent extensive training with their canine partners, and it has been a great experience for them to take part in the study."

The project was the result of a collaboration between SA Pathology, the University of Adelaide's School of Animal and Veterinary Sciences and the Northern Adelaide Local Health Network. Funding for the initiative was provided by The Hospital Research Foundation Group and the University of Adelaide.

Senior lecturer in the University of Adelaide's School of Animal and Veterinary Sciences, Dr Anne-Lise Chaber hopes that if successful, the study could pave the way for detector dogs to be used more widely in community settings to prevent transmission of the virus.

"This pilot study is an exciting development and has the potential to be implemented in a range of other settings to help prevent the spread of COVID-19," she said.

"We saw that dogs were a reliable screening tool in our airport trial last year, however, relying on a sweat sample was too time-consuming. Specially trained dogs are able to sniff out and identify positive COVID-19 cases faster and earlier than PCR and more reliably than rapid antigen tests. This study will tell us if the sniffer dogs are as reliable at testing people directly in a hospital setting.

"Dogs have a remarkable ability to hone in on COVID-19, and their strike rate for sniffing out the virus is more than 97 per cent, even in symptom-free cases in controlled settings."



CATS' EUPHORIC REACTIONS TO CATNIP MAY HAVE A HIDDEN BENEFIT

We all love to watch cats who respond enthusiastically to catnip and it's generally thought that this particular plant, and its Asian counterpart silver vine, must have some sort of intoxicative properties to elicit such a lively response from our feline friends.

However, now researchers in Japan have discovered that when playful kitties damage catnip by rubbing on it, rolling on it, licking it or chewing it, the plant releases higher amounts of a known insect repellent, which better protects them from an assortment of tiny pests and bugs.

Catnip and silver vine leaves both contain the chemical compounds nepetalactol and nepetalactone. These are known as iridoids and they are found in a large variety of plants and some animals. The compounds effectively protect the plants from herbivores and against infection by some microorganisms.

Lead author of the new Japanese study, Dr Masao Miyazaki, is an animal behaviour researcher at Iwate University in Morioka. To work out how the behaviour of cats was affecting the chemicals released by the plants, Dr Miyazaki and some of his colleagues worked with chemists at Nagoya University in Chikusa-ku, Nagoya.

"We found that physical damage of silver vine by cats promoted the immediate emission of total iridoids, which was 10-fold higher than from intact leaves," he told *Live Science*.

The scientists discovered that not only were more iridoids released by the plants when cats damaged them, but that their composition also changed in ways that appeared to encourage the felines even more.

"Nepetalactol accounts for over 90 per cent of total iridoids in intact leaves, but this drops to about 45 per cent in damaged leaves as other iridoids greatly increase," Dr Miyazaki said. "The altered iridoid mixture corresponding to damaged leaves promoted a much more prolonged response in cats."

To find out whether the animals were reacting to these compounds specifically or not, the cats in the study were given meals containing pure nepetalactone and nepetalactol.

"Cats show the same response to iridoid cocktails and natural plants, except for chewing," Dr Miyazaki revealed. "They lick the chemicals on the plastic dish and rub against and roll over on the dish."

He went on to say that when iridoid cocktails were applied on the bottom of dishes that were covered by a punctured plastic cover so that the cats in the study couldn't access them, the felines still reacted by licking and chewing on the bottom of the dish, even though they couldn't reach the chemicals directly.

"This means that licking and chewing is an instinctive behaviour elicited by olfactory stimulation of iridoids," Dr Miyazaki said.

For their next study, Dr Miyazaki and his team hope to understand which gene is responsible for causing cats' reaction to the catnip and silver vine plants.

"Our future studies promise to answer the key remaining questions of why this response is limited to the Felidae species, and why some cats don't respond to these plants," he said.

You can read more about this study in the journal *iScience*.

A Phase 1 clinical trial involving canine patients was conducted between October 2018 and December 2020. During this time, 21 dogs of various breeds with metastatic lung disease from osteosarcoma or melanoma were treated with IL-15.

The dogs in the study inhaled a mist containing IL-15 twice a day. Their doses were increased over time, to help researchers determine not only the efficacy of the immunotherapy treatment but also what levels were tolerable in the canine patients.

One of the most promising findings was that the dogs involved in the trial exhibited meaningful responses within 14 days of starting to inhale the mist. Two of the dogs responded especially well and their tumours shrank dramatically. One of them even went into complete remission for over a year. In five of the other dogs, cancer that had been developing rapidly, stabilised for several months after they received their IL-15 treatment.

Commenting on the study, surgical oncologist Professor Robert J. Canter from the UC Davis Comprehensive Cancer Center, who is also the chief of the UC Davis Division of Surgical Oncology and co-director of the comparative oncology training program at UC Davis, said that the clinical benefit rate for the dogs in the study was close to 40 per cent.

"No one previously had administered IL-15 as an inhaled treatment in dogs to deliver it directly to the site of the cancer," he explained. "We came up with that idea as a means of reducing exposure to the rest of the body, in order to improve the benefit-risk ratio, to improve the immune-stimulating effects, and to reduce toxicity.

"As part of our comparative oncology research, we are strong advocates of clinical trials in companion dogs, especially for immunotherapy, as a way to speed bench-to bedside translation. The cancers that afflict dogs, including sarcomas, brain tumours, lymphoma and melanoma, are incredibly similar to cancers that humans develop," he added.

Canine oncology professor Robert Rebhun from the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine's Department of Surgical and Radiological Sciences was a corresponding author on the study with Professor Canter.

One of their most encouraging findings was that the therapy was well tolerated by the patients in the trial, and even just a two-week course of inhaled IL-15 could potentially result in sustained suppression of advanced and diffuse metastatic cancer.

"All of the canine patients in this study had advanced metastatic cancer, and the majority already had received prior chemotherapy, radiation therapy and, in some cases, immunotherapy," Professor Rebhun said. "Studies are ongoing now to see whether we can predict which patients might respond to this therapy based on properties of the tumour or the patient's immune status.

"This may help us identify patients that might respond to this therapy, as well as help us understand how to potentially combine other immunotherapies to improve response rates.

"We are grateful to the extremely dedicated clients who sought any and all possible care for their pets, elected to enrol them in this study, and even delivered the inhaled IL-15 to their dogs at home – in hopes that it could benefit their dog, other dogs, or possibly even people with advanced metastatic cancer."

Both professors agreed that in future clinical applications, IL-15 would likely be used in combination with other treatment options in the fight against cancer.

You can read more about this study in the Journal for *ImmunoTherapy of Cancer*.



Prof Canter enjoys a moment with his own dog, Clementine

Photo courtesy of UC Davis

PROMISING NEW IMMUNOTHERAPY TOOL IN FIGHT AGAINST CANINE AND HUMAN CANCER

According to groundbreaking cancer research out of the US, a protein that is naturally produced in the body – interleukin-15 (IL-15) – may be used as a new immunotherapy tool to help fight canine and human cancer.

Oncology researchers for both companion dogs and humans from UC Davis, California joined scientific experts from a range of other universities to study a new approach that triggers the body's defence mechanisms, by mobilising its T-cells and natural killer (NK) cells, to respond and eliminate cancer.

They found that amplified concentrations of IL-15 were successful in stimulating canine immune system defences against some forms of the devastating disease. IL-15 is one of several types of cytokines – substances secreted by cells that are known to have both signalling and regulating functions in immune system activity.

ASAV HAPPENINGS



**ELAINE
Robertson**

MY NAME IS ELAINE ROBERTSON, AND I BEGAN MY NEW ROLE AS AVA EXECUTIVE OFFICER, SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS ON 1 AUGUST THIS YEAR WORKING WITH THE ASAV, AVBIG (BEHAVIOUR) AND UPAV (EXOTICS AND AVIAN) GROUPS.

I am based on the Central Coast in NSW, however I work out of the AVA National Office in St Leonards, Sydney, on Mondays and Tuesdays.

I come to the ASAV Executive Officer role from my most recent position as Executive Officer for the Categories 2 and 3 Special Interest Groups working with: Acupuncture, Conservation Biology, Dental, Welfare, Industry, Public Health, Pigs, Poultry, Integrative, and Research and Academia.

My background is in not-for-profit membership associations and event management. I previously worked for the Australian Hotels Association for seven years and then the Hyatt Regency Hotel, Sydney before joining the AVA back in 2019.

I consider myself to be a lifelong learner and welcome opportunities to acquire new ways of thinking and doing things both in my work and personal life. I am looking forward to working with the ASAV SIG Executive Committee and all of our members, as I strive to make a proactive contribution to the delivery of high-quality member services in the areas of voice, education, community and support. I also very much look forward to further developing opportunities for professional, educational and networking with peers that will directly benefit you and your practice.

We have some exciting programs in the pipeline for the next 12 months and beyond, so watch this space for further information about them in future editions of *Companion*.

We value every one of our ASAV members and I look forward to meeting with you soon. In the meantime, if you'd like to get in touch, please feel free to contact me directly via email: elaine.robertson@ava.com.au or telephone: **(02) 9431 5082**.

ASAV EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

I would also like to take this opportunity to warmly welcome our new ASAV Executive Committee members: Dr Leon Warne, Dr Louisa Poutsma and Dr Marlena Lopez, all of whom who were appointed at our ASAV annual meeting on Tuesday, 26 July 2022 in Darwin.

I very much look forward to working with you and the full ASAV Executive Committee for 2022/2023:

- President and Eastern Representative – David Lee
- President Elect and General Representative – Stephen Yeomans
- Southern Representative – Bruce Parry
- Northern Representative – Bruce Mackay
- Western Representative – Leon Warne
- General Representative – Louisa Poutsma
- General Representative – Karen Jackson
- General Representative – Julia Crawford

- Recent Graduate Representative – Marlena Lopez
- ASAV Nominee to the AVA Board – Alistair Webb.

ASAV UNIVERSITY PRIZES

Every year, ASAV provides a prize to a number of outstanding students enrolled in a veterinary science degree at an Australian university. Charles Sturt University recently held their 'Welcome to the Profession' Dinner for the Class of 2022, where they announced their winner of the Australian Small Animal Veterinarians Prize, Jack Robinson.

The university has kindly provided the image below of Jack accepting his award.

Well done, Jack!



Winner Jack Robinson (left) being presented with his award by Dr Scott Edwards from the School of Agricultural, Environmental and Veterinary Sciences, Charles Sturt University



In-clinic, Quantitative NT-proBNP testing

A new quantitative POC analyzer allows fast, onsite measurement of NT-proBNP, minimizing preanalytical error and reducing variability.

Kendal E. Harr | Sonya G. Gordon | Ryan D. Baumwart | Ross Feldgreber | Matthew R. Spiro
 Vet Clin Pathol. 2022;00:1–10. (DOI: 10.1111/vcp.13101)

B-type natriuretic peptide (BNP) is a 32-amino acid cardiac natriuretic peptide hormone that is secreted into the circulation by cardiac myocytes and fibroblasts in response to myocardial stress or stretch of the heart's walls due to increased volume and pressure, and its production is therefore significantly upregulated in cardiac failure.

BNP is secreted as a prohormone, proBNP, and then cleaved into the biologically active hormone, BNP, and the non active amino-terminus, NT-proBNP (76 amino acids); therefore, the concentration of either can be used to assess the magnitude of myocardial wall stress or stretch (Figure 1). However, the N-terminal pro-brain natriuretic peptide (NT-proBNP) is more stable and has a longer half-life than both the prohormone and BNP, making it a useable diagnostic analyte. A new quantitative POC analyzer allows fast, onsite measurement of NT-proBNP, minimizing preanalytical error and reducing variability.

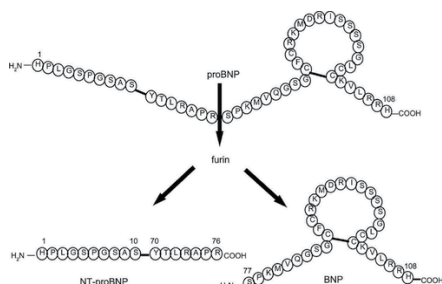


Figure 1. Production of NT-proBNP and BNP

This study aimed to analytically validate an NT- proBNP assay (Vcheck) according to American Society of Veterinary Clinical Pathology (ASVCP) and Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA) specifications.

Precision and LOQ

Imprecision varied across concentrations with the lowest CV at the highest concentration as expected. Imprecision was considered acceptable with a coefficient of variation ranging from 9% at 4000 pmol/L to 12% at 1900 pmol/L.

The precision performance of Vcheck was verified, and performance was deemed acceptable for an immunoassay.

Accuracy

A comparison of the Vcheck assay with the Cardiopet NT-proBNP assay revealed an excellent correlation with minimal bias when preanalytical factors were controlled.

The linear equation was $y=0.9x+37$ ($R^2=0.9$) with 95% Cis and a slope of 0.75-1.05 and an intercept of -150 to 224 (Figure 2).

When 61 samples were treated in a real-world, in-clinic setting, the R^2 falls to 0.8 and it generated a significantly different linear equation, $y=0.7x-52$. So, onsite testing can

minimize variability related to preanalytical error and provide clinically useful contemporaneous results.

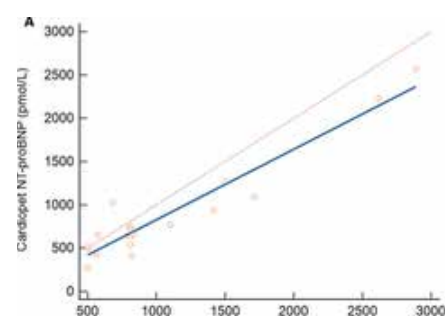


Figure 2. Comparison of the Vcheck and Cardiopet NT- proBNP assays.

"Results of this study demonstrate that the Vcheck NT-proBNP assay is a valid point-of-care cardiac biomarker using canine serum."



For the Full Study Published in Veterinary Clinical Pathology Journal



BioNote, Inc.
 22, Samsung 1-ro 4-gil, Hwaseong-si, Gyeonggi-do, 18449, Republic of Korea
 TEL: 82-31-211-0516 | FAX : 82-31-8003-0618 | www.bionote.co.kr

Precise Diagnostics for Improved Care,

Vcheck analyzer

- In-House immunoassay for Quantitative Results
- Up to 26+ Biomarkers Available



For information on our **No Charge V200 Installation*** promotion please enquire through our website.

* Conditions apply



FEATURED MEMBER



MARLENA LOPEZ

Our featured member for this issue is Marlena Lopez, a vet who works for RSPCA Victoria at a large animal shelter in Melbourne.

She tells Heather Vaile about her early life growing up in a small town in the US, why she enjoys connecting with pet owners, animal lovers and aspiring vet students on social media, and how she hopes to use her new role on ASAV's Executive Committee to help bring about changes in the veterinary profession.

Marlena Lopez is a recent graduate vet with a megawatt smile, a great passion for animal welfare, and a genuine desire to help bring about change in the veterinary industry.

She began her life in the pretty small town of Big Bear Lake in the heart of Southern California. The town is located about 2000m above sea level and is popular for mountain biking, horse riding and fishing in summer, and snowboarding and skiing in winter.

"It was good small-town living and I think growing up surrounded by so much nature really ignited my love and respect for animals and the environment," Marlena says.

She and her sister were raised by their single mother who didn't have the opportunity to advance her own education. She was focused on the education of her daughters and intent on providing them with the opportunities she didn't have growing up. When Marlena and her sister showed interest in the sciences, she really encouraged it.

"My mum always recounts that as soon as I could talk, I would go round and tell everyone that I wanted to be an animal doctor when I grew up," Marlena says. "At such a young age, I don't think I really had any concept of what vets actually do, but I just knew that I loved animals, animal doctors helped animals, so that's what I was determined to do."

"As soon as I expressed interest in becoming a vet, my mother gave me some supervised

responsibilities of the daily maintenance and care of our companion animals.

"We had a variety of animals growing up including dogs, a cat, rabbit, fish, and horses. Having pets enhanced my childhood, and nurtured values of kindness, compassion, and personal responsibility.

"And I did have a special dog growing up. There's nothing that really exceeds all the memories that you have of a childhood pet. I had a yellow Lab named Jimmy. He showed me how to care for animals and really stemmed my passion for animal welfare."

Marlena also recalls one of her teachers from high school with great admiration and fondness and says he influenced her perspective on what she wanted from her own future career.

"I had a really dedicated physics teacher in high school, Mr Bradley, who's actually retiring this year. He just had such a devotion to his job, with a lot of enthusiasm. He would say: 'Physics is life! Life is physics!' The passion he had really inspired me to pursue a job that I would be equally passionate about. He was really incredible."

After completing secondary school, Marlena, like many young people of her age, was ready to become more independent. She packed up her car and headed off to San Francisco for university.

She enrolled in a zoology degree at San Francisco State University, however, halfway through her studies, Marlena got itchy feet.

She decided to travel overseas. Marlena loved the idea of exploring another culture

so she moved to Madrid to study Spanish language and literature at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid for a year.

She then returned to the US to continue studying zoology, but transferred to California State Polytechnic University, Pomona (Cal Poly) where she enjoyed the learning experience immensely.

"I LOVED my experiences at Cal Poly, it was an incredible university with professors and staff who were very dedicated to helping and inspiring students," Marlena says.

In particular, she was inspired to delve more into science and ecology subjects because she wanted to learn more about the building blocks of all living things.

"The complex linked systems of organelles, proteins, and membranes that make the composition of each cell and the way these cells interact to form body systems, it really sparked my interest in biology further," Marlena says.

Around the same time, she also applied and was accepted into the Ronald E. McNair Scholars Program which aims to increase participation in graduate degrees by students who are typically underrepresented in tertiary education institutions because of financial limitations or other socio-economic barriers to advancement. With the support of this program, she completed a research project in reptilian ecology in addition to her coursework.

After attaining a Bachelor of Science in Zoology in 2014, Marlena completed a



research internship in Costa Rica studying the social ecology of bats.

“The McNair program provided me with a lot of opportunities, and I did consider pursuing a career in research,” she says.

“I grew up my entire life thinking I wanted to become a vet and was suddenly conflicted about this choice. I applied to Masters, PhD, and DVM programs, but as soon as I was accepted into the DVM program, there was no question that that was the one I was going to go for.”

In her mid-twenties, Marlena made the huge decision to move 16,000 kms from home and enrol in the DVM course in Melbourne. It was such an exciting time in her life, she decided to create an Instagram page to show family and friends back home what she was learning in vet school and to share her experiences of being an international student living in Australia.

To her surprise and delight, her page **@veterinary_adventures** also started to gain the attention of animal lovers and aspiring vet students from all over the globe. Marlena enjoyed these interactions and found it rewarding to know that she was educating others on social media with similar interests to her own.

She mentions that when she was a pre-vet student, she didn't really know who to turn to for advice on applying to vet school and says: “I wished I had been able to connect to veterinary students and learn from their experiences.

“Completing vet school applications can be a really daunting process and I always wished that I had somebody that I could turn to and ask for advice.”

The popularity of her Instagram posts has continued to grow and today, Marlena has over 70,000 followers!

“I've been able to talk to a lot of students from around the world which is really inspiring for me,” she says happily. “I think that social media is a really powerful tool that can help vets and organisations within the animal community connect with local pet owner populations, but it's also a great way to – hopefully – encourage, inspire, and help the next generation as well.”

Marlena adds that going through vet school and managing a high caseload as a recent graduate vet is not easy and she wants to share her experiences online, so that people get a genuine insight into what it's really like, rather than a curated version of a veterinary career that skips over the hard parts.

“I encountered many struggles in university, so I hope that by being honest about the adversity I've faced, it helps show other people that they're not alone,” she says.

“Because that's definitely how I felt at the time. We're told to be strong and suck it up for so long, it makes you feel that it's such a privilege to even get to vet school, that you're not allowed to suffer once you're there. But there are a lot of people suffering in vet med and I think it's important for us to be honest about it.”

“By showing what life is like as a vet and really what goes on behind the scenes, I can hopefully bridge the gap between clients and vets and improve the standard of care pets are receiving, as well as improve job satisfaction and the mental health of veterinary professionals.”

As she continues to reflect on her veterinary journey so far, Marlena recounts that one of

the best parts of her DVM course was the friendships she formed with her fellow vet students along the way.

“Vet school for me was a bunch of highs and lows and there were a lot of times when I felt really overwhelmed and stressed, she says candidly. “We had a really heavy course load and I relied on my classmates a lot and I still confide in them today.”

One of the more challenging shared experiences for Marlena and her classmates was trying to finish their final year of the course during the first dreadful year of the pandemic.

However, despite the many shocks, interruptions and cancellations of extra-mural placements that occurred during that year, Marlena proudly graduated with her DVM at the end of 2020.

“My biggest supporter through all of it was my fiancé David,” Marlena says.

“He provided me with much needed emotional, esteem, and tangible support to make it through my studies and during the start of my career.”

NEXT STOP, RSPCA VICTORIA

Marlena landed her first job almost immediately after graduating and in January 2021, she started work at RSPCA Victoria's animal shelter in Burwood East.

“I've always had a passion for animal welfare and an interest in working in shelter medicine, she says.

“There was a job advertised at the RSPCA, not looking for a recent grad at the time, but I took the opportunity and applied anyway. And I'm really grateful to be working there.

“I've had the opportunity to garner my consultation and medicine skills, as well as see a large variety of cases and attain really valuable surgery and training experience. General practice vets mainly focus on the health of individual animals, whereas shelter vets provide individual and population care to local animals. As a recent graduate at the RSPCA, I have had the best of both worlds – because I'm gaining experience as a general practitioner serving the local community, but also learning a lot about shelter medicine by providing veterinary care to homeless animals.”

Marlena also points out that most of the animals that enter the RSPCA shelter come with little to no medical history, arrive from different locations and life experiences, have a variety of exposure histories, and may very well have missed out on the preventative medicine generally considered to be routine by most small animal practitioners and responsible pet owners.

“This means the shelter population is at a higher risk of infection, diseases, and





behavioural problems,” she explains. “Working there has definitely made me a stronger clinician, and the exposure to such a variety of cases has helped me to hone where my interests are. For example, I have a clinical interest in soft tissue surgery, and I’ve gotten a lot of experience in that over the last year.”

When asked what it is that appeals to her about this area of veterinary medicine, she replies that she enjoys the sense of transformation at the end of an operation, “providing an instant gratification.”

By way of example, she mentions a very recent case she’s worked on.

“Yesterday, I was working with one of our amazing surgeons, Dr John Parncutt. A cat

“There is a team of senior vets at RSPCA who know how to turn each query into a very teachable moment, and I’ve learned a lot from their expertise.”

in foster care presented, not really himself, flat, and not eating. I was quite concerned. X-rays revealed that he had a diaphragmatic hernia, so he was rushed to surgery and I assisted in resolving the issue.

“I checked in on him today and he’s doing really well.

“Surgery is often something where you can just see, feel, and fix the problem. There is generally a quick and incredibly rewarding answer in surgery a lot of the time.”

Marlena also enjoys working at the RSPCA because she feels very well supported by her senior colleagues at the organisation. Her special interest in surgery stemmed from

the mentoring she has received from senior surgeons Dr John Parncutt and Dr Preethi Karunaratne.

“As a vet, I have had incredible mentors,” she says. “There is a team of senior vets at RSPCA who know how to turn each query into a very teachable moment, and I’ve learned a lot from their expertise.”

As for the most difficult part of her job, Marlena’s answer is one that vets of all stripes will relate to: “The hardest part would probably be managing client communication and expectations, and trying to maintain that healthy work/life balance.

“I think the pandemic has really exacerbated a lot of the difficulties with client communication. And I think that finding a healthy work/life balance is something that I’m still really learning to navigate. It’s something that requires regular maintenance and evaluation.”

LENDING A HAND TO PETS IN THE PARK

In addition to her very busy job at the RSPCA, Marlena has also been actively volunteering with the non-profit organisation Pets in the Park (PITP) for several years. The charity aims to improve the well-being of people who are suffering from homelessness and who need some veterinary assistance to care for their pets.

Marlena began to volunteer with PITP as a veterinary nurse while she was still a university student, but enjoyed the experience so much, she continued to volunteer after settling into her new job.

“Coming from a socio-economically disadvantaged household, I personally understand the challenge of providing quality healthcare to your pets, so I use my education and experience to help families

and their companion animals achieve optimal health and happiness,” she explains.

“And it’s really quite rewarding work. I find it rewarding to go more often because then you get to really form relationships with the clients at the clinic. I really get to see how they and their animals are going over time. You’re volunteering your time and services, but it definitely doesn’t feel like work!”

CONNECTING WITH THE AVA AND ASAV

Marlena first joined the AVA as a veterinary student and later the ASAV as well.

In 2018 she won a student scholarship to attend an ASAV conference in Melbourne and she’s been hooked on the fabulous learning and networking opportunities they offer ever since!

“It was really great – all pressure-free learning and there wasn’t any quiz afterwards!” she says. “You can attend all the lectures strictly for the learning part of it and network as well. And I think it really helped me, now looking for jobs as a new grad or just for connecting with other people in the field.

“The AVA has provided me with a lot of opportunities and I’m really grateful that they support students by having those scholarships.

“Being raised in such a small town with limited resources and opportunities, I had to go out and create my own opportunities. So, I think that probably helped give me – I guess boldness is the right term. I’m not afraid to ask questions or try to go out and create my own opportunities for learning.

“When you’re raised in a small town, you have to learn to be bold!”

Recently, Marlena was elected to the role of Recent Graduate Representative on the ASAV’s Executive Committee.

When asked why she wanted to take on this new extra responsibility, she replies that she knows many of her peers from her DVM course have been struggling since entering the veterinary workforce and she wants to see meaningful change in the profession.

“I think that the veterinary industry is currently facing a lot of challenges and it’s hard to highlight that without sounding too negative or too critical – that’s a hard balance,” she says.

“But I do think that a lot of clinics and organisations sometimes overlook the challenges and just focus on trying to promote mental wellness by just concentrating on the positives of the career.

“It’s a really rewarding career and there are a lot of positives to it, but I think it is also equally important for people to know that they’re not alone in their struggles. And also – to call for change.”

Marlena goes on to say that a lot of the conversations at the AVA conference this year were about what needs to change in the profession and that she hopes to use her position on the ASAV Executive Committee to serve as an advocate for her colleagues and to foster a greater sense of collegiality in the small animal vet community.

As for what kind of changes she'd like to see, Marlena replies that an overhaul in terms of veterinary salaries, support for new grads, and a review of some management procedures would be high on her list.

She mentions that some of her former vet school classmates have talked candidly to her about their struggles since starting work and expressed their disappointment that the career isn't what they had pictured.

So how does she think recent graduates could be better supported in the industry?

"Well, it is multifactorial, she says. "So, there are probably a lot of things that clinics can do to support new graduates – and that new graduates can do to help themselves.

"Right now, it is quite a tough time for new graduates to enter the profession. I think that vet clinics need more staff and are struggling to hire more experienced staff. But at the time I was graduating, I know some clinics were hiring new grads with the promise to offer them mentorship and guidance without providing the resources to fulfill this commitment."

Marlena contrasts this with her own experience working as part of a large veterinary team and she knows she is very fortunate to have a pool of experienced vets she can turn to for support. However, she understands that this isn't an option available to everyone.

"But something that my workplace implemented that I think all clinics could apply is an organised training schedule for new grads," she says.

"And when new grads are doing interviews, they could look and enquire to see if clinics offer this. My classmates have reported that their biggest struggle as a new grad is not having enough support.

"Many of my former classmates have left at least one job within their first year of clinical practice. A lot of them are really struggling to find good mentorship and support."

"New grads also need to feel safe, and clinics should have a protocol in place on how to deal with abusive clients."

"We enter the profession because we're passionate about animal welfare, but we're seeing so many people leave it prematurely due to the pressures of the job."

Marlena applauds the RSPCA for how well it supports its new veterinary staff and mentions how much she has benefitted from



the organisation's commitment to nurturing of new team members.

"I had one-on-one scheduled meetings with a designated RSPCA mentor at two weeks, one month, then every three months – and I still have them to check in and set goals together. I started with a week of doing vaccination consults, before gradually introducing other consults into my list. And during my first three weeks, there was always a senior vet rostered on administration work, so I could turn to them for support.

"I think it's really important for new graduates to have – and to seek out – an organised training program or practical and surgery skills. And for all these expectations to be communicated to and with the scheduling staff.

"I understand that it's quite difficult to have extra hands available for training when there's a vet shortage, but I think it's really pertinent that clinics looking to hiring new grads are prepared to help them thrive and not just merely survive their first year in clinical practice."

Marlena obviously thinks deeply about the complex issues facing the veterinary industry, and perhaps unsurprisingly, in addition to her work with the ASAV she's also a member of the AVA's Veterinary Business Group (VBG).

However, she was taken completely by surprise in her final year of university, when the VBG awarded her the distinction of being the Veterinary Business Thought Leader of the Year (2020) for her social media work in educating pet owners and pre-vet students about the profession.

Marlena says at the time she thought that she was just applying for another scholarship so she could attend a VBG annual summit but was thrilled when she received a far bigger honour than she was expecting!

LOOKING AHEAD

Marlena's resourcefulness and passion for helping animals, her empathy for others, and her gift for communicating through social media talents to improve outcomes for pets, their people, and the veterinary professionals they meet suggest she has a very bright future ahead of her.

So, does she have a dream job that she sees herself doing one day?

"I'm still in the infancy of my career and I have a lot of varied interests that I'm trying to explore right now," she replies. "And the great thing about general practitioners is that each day is so varied.

"I do have a passion for wildlife and conservation, but I also enjoy the work in small animal practice. I think pet owner education is important and something that I'm interested in – so I'm not sure where that leaves me."

"My career goals are to continue volunteering and learning about wildlife and conservation medicine, but also work within a small animal clinic and somehow incorporate social media and other forms of media into that work.

"I think it's important to grow. You don't really learn what you like until you try out different things, so I want to remain open to opportunities." 🐾

A day in the life of ... Malena Lopez



7 AM My foster cat Lily is a good snooze alarm as she is eagerly waiting for me to wake up and will start purring in my ear as soon as my alarm goes off. I turn on my coffee machine first thing in the morning to let the machine warm up while I get dressed. I feed Lily and take my coffee to go. I often use my 45-minute commute to work as a time to call family and friends from back home, given the time difference, it's the evening on the west coast of the United States.

8 AM My shift starts at 8.30 am. I am looking after the shelter animals today and I start by visiting the barn. I give a pentosan polysulphate injection to a goat with degenerative joint disease, create a treatment plan for a guinea pig with pododermatitis, and review faecal analysis results of sheep. I then spend some time writing notes and call clients seen the day before in consult to relay test results and formulate treatment plans.

10 AM After taking a coffee break, I visit the adoptions area to see what animals need a vet assessment. There's a cat

showing signs of respiratory illness – cat flu is something I am often tasked with treating in a shelter environment. I visit each area of adoptions, including the cat condos, dog pens, and rabbit and guinea pig runs and perform whatever tasks are needed. I finish the morning by performing a health check on a dog, each animal in our care receives a full health check every 28 days.

12 NOON I return to the clinic to write my clinical notes before having lunch.

1 PM There are a lot of dogs under our care, so the next couple of hours are spent looking after the dogs in the kennels. I complete a variety of tasks including health checks and vaccinations of recently arrived dogs, post-operative wound and dental extraction site checks, creating treatment plans for skin disease or weight management, completing ear cytology or mass FNA, and collecting blood and urine for analysis. There is a separate shelter shift that focuses on providing veterinary care to the cats in the shelter.

4 PM The last area of the shelter I visit is the wildlife and exotics ward. There are a

variety of species to care for in this sector, including native wildlife, rabbits, guinea pigs, mice, and birds. I have an interest in wildlife and conservation medicine, so playing a small role in helping native animals become rehabilitated back into the environment is a really fulfilling part of my job.

7 PM I get home, have a shower, and then my partner and I make dinner together. I brush Lily's teeth and she eats dinner at the same time as us. We watch a crime drama in the evening to wind down at the end of the day, with my Lily on my lap for comfort.

9 PM I usually do some computer work before bed such as writing content for social media or responding to emails. Right now, I am working on a set of educational materials for new dog and cat owners to provide them with advice for taking care of their new companion. This is set to be published next year and will include a mix of advice for dealing with common problems and questions they may have and provides some inspiration for anyone struggling with their new pet. 🐾



CAT REHAB!

Q&A with *Kirsty Nalvarte*



In this edition of *Companion* magazine, we talk to RSPCA Queensland's Kirsty Nalvarte about the community-based charity's specialised 'cat rehab' program in Brisbane.

Every year, the small but dedicated team of behaviour trainers at the Wacol Animal Care Campus are successfully turning hundreds of frightened, fractious felines into much calmer, happier animals.

The rehab program not only helps traumatised cats feel more contented and comfortable while in care – but also gives them the time and support they need to show the best version of themselves to potential adopters, greatly improving their chances of finding a loving forever home.

Editor Heather Vaile asked Kirsty to tell us more about it.

Just to start off with, could you tell me a little bit about yourself, for example, how long you've had a professional interest in cats and what your current role is with RSPCA Queensland?

I have worked at RSPCA Queensland for close to 10 years and am so lucky to hold such a rewarding role. As head of behaviour at RSPCA Queensland, I get to support our staff and volunteers in caring for the emotional health of the animals in care at our nine shelters across the state.

I began my RSPCA journey as a volunteer on a Sunday morning, cleaning, feeding and spending time with the 'incoming' cats. I was looking for a way to give back and found that my volunteering shifts really aligned with my values. It was such a great feeling to be helping and providing care for animals without a home or a family. I decided then that I would do anything it took to change careers and get a foot in the door in the animal welfare industry.

Since then, I've spent most of my waking hours studying animal behaviour and training. I've always been interested in psychology and the way our pets learn really isn't that different from the way we humans do.

I am privileged to lead an incredible team of behaviour trainers who work tirelessly to help animals feel safe and comfortable, despite the challenges that come with a busy shelter environment.

How did the cat rehab program come about and how long has it been running at the RSPCA's Wacol Animal Care Campus?

Our program for rehabilitating fractious cats and kittens was introduced by San Diego-based animal shelter consultant Renee Harris around nine years ago. We initially started out with one animal rehabilitation trainer working with one litter of undersocialised kittens at a time.

Today we have a dedicated team of behaviour trainers who work with cats and kittens seven days a week in our Feline Rehabilitation Centre at our Wacol Animal Care Campus, as well as fractious cat programs running in all animal care centres in Queensland. Last year we enrolled 793 adult cats in the program, in addition to our fractious kitten program which has a 100 per cent success rate.



Kirsty Nalvarte with one of her young charges



I read on RSPCA Queensland's blog that it's called the 'Fractious Cat and Kitten Protocol'. Is that because you follow the same protocol for all cats that take part in the program or do you tailor your responses to each individual cat's behaviour and circumstances?

We have individual protocols for fearful adult cats, highly aroused adult cats and fearful or undersocialised kittens.

What kind of unwanted or unhelpful behaviours do you see most often in stray, surrendered or abandoned cats?

We often find that cats who are surrendered to the shelter can display worse behaviours than even stray cats. Cats often find change extremely difficult and the shock of a new environment can make them feel unsafe and distressed. There's really no way to tell whether a cat has been socialised or is wild without allowing an opportunity for the cat to settle and their stress levels to reduce.

When a cat feels threatened, they can hiss, spit and swipe out in an effort to create distance between themselves and the perceived threat, which sadly, is usually the people who are trying to help them.

What are some of the practical strategies you use to help these cats?

It's extremely important to help cats who are new to the shelter environment feel safe as soon as we can. Each cat gets a plush bed with a raised lip like a donut so they can snuggle in and feel like they can hide, as well as a cardboard box and toys to soak up their scent.

Every time an animal attendant, behaviour trainer or veterinary staff member visits the cat, they bring a little food treat like a piece of roast chicken or a teaspoon of wet food to help the cat feel good about humans visiting their pen.

We start our sessions very hands-off. Less is more with cats. Soft blinks and a gentle voice can go a really long way! Younger cats and kittens respond really well to play therapy and can gain confidence when offered a trailed piece of string or quiet wand toy.

When we feel the cat is ready to interact the trainer will offer a pointed knuckle and let the cat bunt into it. We let the cat lead the interaction whenever possible. We can then extend a finger and stroke along the jawline.

Some cats can display aggressive behaviour as a result of the



frustration that comes with being confined, the stress of not being able to see approaching threats from all angles or from being housed close to other cats. We have an office foster program at the Wacol Animal Care Campus where cats can spend time away from other felines and enjoy more space. Often as soon as the cat exits the carry crate in their new space, their behaviour changes immediately and they appear to be a completely different cat.

How many cats take part in the program at any one time and how long does a cat typically spend doing it?

Our Feline Rehabilitation Centre at Wacol has capacity for 10 adult cats and 10 kittens at a time. Adult cats spend an average of two weeks undergoing rehabilitation whereas kittens generally only take a couple of days before often completing their rehabilitation with other social kittens in a foster home.

What sort of success rate have you had with the program so far?

Last year, we enrolled 793 cats in the program with an 82 per cent success rate. So far this year we have enrolled 404 cats and are currently sitting at a 90 per cent success rate.

Is it harder to modify behaviour in older cats that may have experienced more trauma and/or been on the streets for a longer period of time?

Adult cats who have a history of prior socialisation are generally quite easy to work with as long as we're able to help them feel safe and secure in their environment. Less important than their time on the street is whether they were positively exposed to humans during the socialisation period.

We assess cats for signs of socialisation with humans such as returning blinks, vocalising or softening in response to a soft voice. Cats who eat during the day and use a litter tray are also promising candidates. We often find that 'street cats' are able to adapt to their new environment faster than cats who have come from a home, especially if that home is the only environment the cat has ever known.

I can recall several cats who were surrendered by elderly owners or after their owner had passed away, one in particular had only ever lived indoors with her owner, and was surrendered wearing a harness. Her behaviour was so aggressive when she first arrived that the veterinary team had to sedate her to remove the harness. After that, we moved her into a quiet office with a staff member who spent time talking to her and feeding her food treats. She slowly started to come out of her hiding spot to solicit attention and came out of her shell.

When we know a cat has had a good history in the home, we offer them for adoption as soon as we can. We recognise that the shelter can be a scary place and that cats don't need to fully adjust to shelter life. We often have adopters who are keen to help in the rehabilitation process and enjoy watching the cats grow in confidence in their new home. The behaviour team check in regularly, at least once a week for the first month after adoption of our more worried cats, to make sure they're settling well and offer advice or support as needed. It's so great for the team to receive the emails with photos and hear about how well the cats are doing in their new homes.

The process for fractious kittens is different because they often come in without any socialisation, but we're able to socialise them through positive experiences with humans using play, food treats and touch.

There are sadly some cats who are extremely fearful of humans and despite our best efforts may never enjoy life as a 'pet'.

Do you have different strategies for dealing with the kittens on the program?

Kittens respond extremely well to play therapy and other social 'role model' kittens. If we receive a feral litter, we split them up and pair them with more confident, social kittens of a similar age.

Our protocol for kittens involves socialisation, rather than assessing for signs of prior socialisation like in adult cats. The basic principles are the same however, in that we try everything possible to help the kittens feel safe and work on conditioning a positive emotional response through interactions the kitten enjoys such as play, providing food treats and gentle touch – first around the jawline.

Kittens are extremely rewarding for the trainers and volunteers because they turn around extremely quickly. It's just awesome to see a kitten go from hissing, growling and spitting to purring, playing and enjoying touch.

Are there other RSPCA staff and volunteers working on the cat rehab program alongside the behaviour trainers?

We have animal care attendants at all nine Animal Care Centres working with fractious cats and kittens to help them to feel safe in care.

At our Wacol Headquarters, in addition to the behaviour trainers we have an incredible team of volunteers who work with the cats and kittens in the Feline Rehabilitation Centre each day. They're the most dedicated and caring group of individuals who turn up rain or shine to help the animals in care. We simply could not do what we do without them. At the moment, we have one or two volunteers per day and a handful of behaviour foster carers who work to rehabilitate cats in a home environment.

We're always looking for more volunteers and foster carers. The more support we have, the more cats and kittens we can help!

Are the cats you help recommended for the program by RSPCA Queensland's veterinary team or how do they get on to the program?

Staff and volunteers from all areas of the shelter are trained to flag scared or unhappy animals with the behaviour team as soon as they observe them. The behaviour team might get a call from our inspectorate to let the team know that an animal is on its way in who might need extra support or the vets might flag an animal at their intake health check. Animal care attendants set up each pen in the cattery to help new cats and kittens feel safe and offer slow, gentle interactions over the cat's first few days in care to determine whether they might need extra time and behaviour modification in a quieter area.

Are you mainly dealing with fearful kitties that want to hide rather than aggressive ones or are the cats that you see often exhibiting a combination of both behaviours?

Cats are prey animals (as well as being predators), so it's not uncommon for them to feel threatened. When housed in a cat condo or pen in a shelter or vet clinic there isn't much option for 'flight' for cats so they can feel that they need to 'fight' to protect themselves. The aggressive behaviours are displayed in an attempt to create distance, and if given the choice, a cat would rather hide away. We find that if we can provide low-stress housing with options for hiding and use of vertical space as well as enrichment and outlets for cats to express normal behaviours, the stress levels reduce and cats don't feel the need to display aggression.



All photos courtesy of RSPCA Queensland



Are there any particular stories that stick out in your mind of fractious cats that have successfully completed the program and then found their forever homes?

We're really lucky to hear from many of our adopters who send us updates of the cats enjoying their new homes. We have photos all over our office walls to remind the team of all of the animals they've helped. It's especially helpful on days where we might have a bad outcome to be reminded of all of the success stories.

I remember one of my first success stories from years back, her name was Biscuit and she was flagged by the animal attendant who was caring for her for being extremely aggressive. Her ears were flattened, she was hissing, spitting and swiping out whenever the animal attendant tried to feed or clean her pen.

I moved her into an office and as soon as she stepped out of the carry crate she was like a different cat. I remember she had such contrasting 'before' and 'after' photos that she was unrecognisable. Since then, we've had hundreds of cats like Biscuit who display completely different behaviour once they are either away from other cats or have more space and choice in their environment and interactions.

I imagine it must be immensely rewarding when you see a cat who has come into the program absolutely terrified become calmer, happier and more trusting of human interactions. Is that your favourite part of the job or is it something else?

The moment a cat solicits attention and we get that 'breakthrough' is absolutely the best part of working with a fractious cat. Now for me, the best part is training others and watching them have breakthroughs!

Do any cats ever fail the program? I was wondering if some cats might have to repeat it or perhaps just stay on it for longer if they're not responding in the time frame that you'd normally expect to see.

For cats who take longer to gain their confidence, our foster program is invaluable. We know that the longer a cat stays in shelter care, the more susceptible they are to breaking with cat flu, especially if they're experiencing stress. Our feline foster carers offer cats a quiet, comfortable environment with less activity than the shelter where cats can gain their confidence. It's extremely rewarding for the carers to watch a shy cat realise that they're safe and start to seek out affection.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

In addition to working with cats in care, we're able to support cat owners through RSPCA School for Pets. We offer private behaviour consultations online as well as in the home to assist with common issues such as inappropriate toileting and aggression. It's exciting to be able to offer a proactive approach, which aims to keep more pets in homes with their families. 🐾



2022 ASAV ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Wrap Up

By ASAV President David Lee

Darwin. Ahhh, Darwin. Did it really happen? It all seems like a great dream, especially when I sit at home in Sydney, on another somewhat familiar, rainy day. But yes, it did happen, and time flies when you are having fun!

There were so many highlights of Darwin 2022, that it's not possible to mention them all in this conference wrap-up. But definitely worth noting a few of the 'highlights within the highlights'.

Let's start with the actual conference proper, and the amazing program, speakers and content that was on show during the week. By combining with the Unusual Pet and Avian Veterinarians, Australian Veterinary Behaviour Interest Group and the Australian Veterinary Dental Society, we showcased a CPD program to cater for every general practitioner in small animal practice. There was something in it for everyone, and no doubt that had a lot to do with the fact that we had over 340 practitioners attend during the week. It was incredible hearing some stories of the sort of travel that some vets had to undertake just to get to Darwin; one having to drive for five hours just to get to Sydney, to then fly over four hours to get to Darwin. But they, like everyone else, saw great value in what we had to offer, and what Darwin had to offer.. and I'm sure, like all of us, they are now back home, reminiscing about how good it was.



The exhibition hall was packed full of trade representatives that were just so happy to be back at a face-to-face conference. The hall was neatly set out to allow ample room for connection and socialisation, and the catering and events team at the Darwin Convention Centre did not disappoint.



And of course, there were the social events! Our own Dr Bruce Mackay hosted our Recent Graduate Dinner, which was a sell-out, and, like every Recent Grad Dinner in the past, it will remain an unforgettable event for all who attended. It's great that we can offer a safe environment where the future of our profession can talk without judgement, and share what are often common feelings of vulnerability through their experiences. And we all quickly realise that we are not alone, and that this unique veterinary community that we are all a part of is always there to help each other out.



The Gala Dinner was also a great spectacle. Dr David Neck hosted a fantastic occasion, and unlike previous Gala Dinners, we celebrated the champions of our profession for the last three years, given the absence of our conference during that time. Our own Dr Geeta Saini was honoured with the John Holt Award for Distinguished Services to the AVA, and Dr Mark Kelman was named the ASAV's 2022 Practitioner of the Year. But as I reiterated on the night, it was a night to not only celebrate the 'champions of our profession', but to celebrate the 'champion profession' that we all are, as members of the wider veterinary industry. It's a title we are well entitled to use, given how resilient we have all been over the last few years!

But to conclude, if there's one moment that will always stay with me, it's what I describe that follows. During the lunch break on one of the days, I walked outside of the convention centre, took a seat on a bench, and I looked around. Sitting on the pavement and on the grassy area around the centre were our delegates, in T-shirts and shorts, eating, drinking, laughing, and just having a great time in the warm Darwin sun. There would have been about 50 delegates doing this, in the middle of 'winter', at a time when there was significant rainfall on the East Coast, and such a contrast to the lockdowns of 12 months prior, where we couldn't even see our clients, let alone travel to the next suburb. I just sat there, quietly soaking in what we were a part of, there in Darwin ... and realised, that good things do come to those that wait. We had all earned the right to be there, and I felt grateful to be a part of it. To Darwin and everybody who contributed to making it such a memorable and joyful event, I say thank you.

2022 ASAV ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Student Scholarship Winners

DANLEI (SAM) WANG

The 2022 ASAV Annual Conference was such an amazing experience. The scientific program was extremely well structured for vets with different levels of experience. Before the conference began, I was a little bit worried that I wouldn't be able to understand the talks because I'm a baby vet who's only been out there for seven months. I was wrong – the talks were highly practical and well explained. Five days later, I came home with much more confidence in the most updated methods of managing common emergencies such as tick paralysis, intoxication, snakebite, sepsis, and tailoring fluid therapy to individual patients. I also just shared my conference notes on blood gas analysis with my colleagues in rounds this week, and everyone was so excited to learn!

The ASAV Recent Graduate Dinner has definitely been one of my favourite social events at all times – this is where recent graduates, students and AVA mentors sit down together and share their stories in the first years of practice over good food and wine. We laughed until we cried. We learnt from each other's mistakes. On a personal note, I have been a high achiever since day one of vet school. My perfectionism is a blessing and a curse: it has been a big drive for me, but it has also led to a lot of self-criticism.

The Recent Graduate Dinner made me realise that we all, even the best vets in the industry, make mistakes sometimes; and unfortunate things can happen, despite our best efforts. I wish I could share some of the stories here, but everything divulged that evening was confidential so that people could feel comfortable speaking candidly. You will have to attend the next one to find out what what kind of things are revealed!

As a returning participant of ASAV/AVA conferences, I was ecstatic to catch up with old friends as well as connect with vets with a similar mindset. The exhibition was a gem too – I was able to source trial opportunities and explore new therapeutic plans for some of my clients, which was something they really appreciated.

Another reason that I love going to conferences is the opportunity to travel. Although I always wanted to visit the 'Top End', I had never been able to find time or an excuse to travel (being busy trying to graduate from vet school, then being busy stressed out being a real vet ...). This conference allowed me to finally visit the beautiful city of Darwin. The winter weather there was lovely in July, I thoroughly enjoyed learning about Aboriginal culture at Kakadu National Park, jumping onto a crocodile cruise, and appreciating the beach sunset with friends, food and beer. This trip was the perfect mid-year break, I felt so replenished when I returned to work.

As a proud member of the ASAV community, I would highly recommend that all of our student members participate in one or more of the various events hosted by the ASAV each year, such as the conferences, webinars and student volunteering opportunities. I would also strongly encourage all student members to apply for this scholarship to benefit from the outstanding education program and the invaluable networking opportunities that the ASAV Annual Conference presents. I look forward to meeting you all at next year's big event on the Gold Coast!

JACOB MOTHA

The 2022 ASAV Annual Conference was a great experience for any student member to have. The opportunities on offer were immeasurable, as the event not only offered great learning experiences from industry leaders and veterinary experts, but also many opportunities to network with practitioners, specialists, and company representatives. This year attracted a mix of multiple special interest groups which meant we had the chance to meet practitioners from a range of different specialties and great exposure to some of the industries that are discussed less often at university.

The entire experience was yet another eye opener to the veterinary profession, especially listening to the concerns and perspectives of other delegates from all around Australia.

The social events were also a great! They were ideal opportunities from the big days of lectures and long hours usually spent at university! The theme of emergency and critical care medicine this year was exciting and reinforced the passion I am gaining for this constantly evolving area of veterinary medicine. The lectures extended on the practical, CPD and university content covered in my veterinary studies, and provided me with a further understanding of the clinical relevance of key concepts which was also very much appreciated.

If you're a student member and you are given the opportunity to attend an ASAV conference in the future, I would say attendance is a must!



Danlei (Sam) Wang with ASAV President David Lee



Jacob Motha (left) with ASAV President David Lee

2022 ASAV ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Socials and Award Winners

After many a cancelled conference over the past few years, we finally got to present our awards, albeit some belatedly, to a small assemblage of very worthy people. Here's a list of the ASAV award winners from 2020 – 2022:

ATWELLS AWARDS – BEST CASE STUDY



Dany Elzahaby

'Treatment of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus pseudintermedius* surgical site infection with linezolid in a Great Dane' *Australian Veterinary Practitioner* Vol 50 (1) March 2020



Waylon Wiseman

'Management of sleep disordered breathing in a dog using continuous positive airway pressure' *Australian Veterinary Practitioner* Vol 51 (1) March 2021



Charles Hawkes

'Metastatic Sertoli cell tumour in a dog treated with surgery, and metronomic cyclophosphamide and toceranib phosphate' *Australian Veterinary Practitioner* Vol 52 (1) March 2022

ATWELL AWARDS – BEST ORIGINAL STUDY



Nicholas Cleland

'Ventral approach for the placement of a toggle rod in two dogs with caudoventral hip luxation' *Australian Veterinary Practitioner* Vol 49 (4) December 2019



Maddie Leaver

'Critical appraisal of medical and dietary treatments of proteinuria in dogs and cats' *Australian Veterinary Practitioner* Vol 50 (3) September 2020



Alecia Evans

'Computed tomography findings and surgical management of acute oropharyngeal stick injuries in dogs' *Australian Veterinary Practitioner* Vol 51 (4) December 2021

2022 ASAV AWARD FOR SCIENTIFIC EXCELLENCE – Dr Claire Sharp



2021 THE JOHN HOLT DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD – Dr Julia Crawford



2022 THE JOHN HOLT DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD – Dr Geeta Saini



2020 ASAV PRACTITIONER OF THE YEAR – Dr Warren Foreman



2022 ASAV ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Socials and Award Winners

2021 ASAV PRACTITIONER OF THE YEAR – Dr Caryn Wun



2022 ASAV PRACTITIONER OF THE YEAR – Dr Mark Kelman



OUR NEW ACCREDITED HOSPITALS

Seven new vet hospitals earned their accreditation over 2020 – 2022, we congratulate them!

- Fulham Gardens Animal Hospital, SA
- Glen Iris Veterinary Hospital, Vic
- Ripponlea Veterinary Hospital, Vic
- Sugarland Animal Hospital, QLD
- Townsend Veterinary Clinic, NSW
- Vasse Veterinary Hospital, WA
- Wayville Animal Hospital, SA

Additionally, 34 ASAV Hospitals of Excellence were re-accredited:

- AdelaideVet Prospect, SA
- AdelaideVet Stirling, SA
- AdelaideVet Trinity Gardens, SA
- Animal Referral and Emergency Centre, Newcastle, NSW
- Bellarine Veterinary Practice, Vic
- Cessnock Veterinary Centre and Hospital, NSW

- Drovers Vet Hospital, WA
- Eltham Central Veterinary Hospital, VIC
- Evervet Prahran, VIC
- Foothills Animal Hospital, WA
- Gungahlin Veterinary Hospital, ACT
- Horsham Veterinary Hospital, VIC
- Karingal Veterinary Hospital, VIC
- Kippax Veterinary Hospital, ACT
- Kirrawee Veterinary Hospital, NSW
- Marion Animal Hospital, SA
- Morley Vetcentre, WA
- Mt Evelyn Veterinary Clinic and Animal Hospital, VIC
- Mulberry Lane Vet Hospital, NSW
- Parap Veterinary Hospital, NT
- Rowville Veterinary Clinic and Hospital, VIC
- Southern Animal Hospital, SA
- Swan Street Veterinary and Wellness Centre, VIC
- Sylvania Veterinary Hospital, NSW
- The Alice Springs Veterinary Hospital, NT
- Turramurra Veterinary Hospital, NSW
- University Veterinary Teaching Hospital Sydney, NSW
- Vet24, Balcatta, WA
- Vetwest Animal Hospital Clarkson, WA
- Vetwest Currambine, WA
- Vetwest Animal Hospital South Perth, WA
- Wembley Veterinary Hospital, WA
- Weston Creek Veterinary Hospital, ACT
- Whitehorse Veterinary Hospital, VIC

Congratulations to all!



Staff from Foothills Animal Hospital receive their golden re-accreditation plaque from ASAV President David Lee



Sharing diagnostic images has never been easier

IDEXX Web PACS takes software to a new level of capability for communications and diagnostic care, enabling you to access diagnostic imaging information via the web.

With enhanced measurement, workflow, and collaboration tools, IDEXX Web PACS helps you share images efficiently in real-time with peers and specialists from multiple locations, anywhere in the world.



Visit idexx.com.au to learn more and sign up for a free demo



PUSHING THROUGH

A couple of resourceful wildlife volunteers in NSW have seized an opportunity to recycle leftover corflutes from the 2022 federal election and are using them as mange flaps to help wombats in the Central West region of the state.

Melinda Kerr is a cofounder of Kanimbla Wombats which she started with Anna Culliton in 2020. The pair are working to improve the lives of bare-nosed wombats, treating the marsupials for the highly contagious sarcoptic mange (also known as canine scabies), caused by the parasitic *Sarcoptes scabiei* mite.

“The mite burrows into the skin causing thick crusty skin and hair loss, these crusts often grow over the wombat’s eyes and ears rendering them blind and deaf,” says Melinda. “It is incredibly itchy, and wombats can injure themselves trying to scratch because of their sharp claws.”

While Anna is out in the field responding to calls in a range of areas west of the Blue Mountains and treating wombats 24/7, Melinda generally works on projects closer to her home in the Kanimbla Valley and focuses her efforts on public education, social media and fundraising.

“I first started working with wombats and helping Anna with mange treatments in 2020,” she explains. “I had just returned home from overseas and didn’t know what to do with myself during lockdowns. I started helping Anna with her wombats and that was when I learnt about mange.”

“I couldn’t believe there was this horrific disease affecting our wombats that I had never heard of. I became a little bit obsessed with learning about it and trying to make sure as many people as possible become educated about mange – what it is, how to identify it, and know that it is treatable.”

It’s thought mange may have arrived in Australia during colonisation via early settlers with scabies or on the backs of domestic dogs and foxes. Either way, Melinda says foxes still play a big role in the transmission of the mites.

Alongside human-related deaths like road accidents and habitat loss, mange is one of the biggest threats to wombats because they are allergic to the *Sarcoptes scabiei* mites’ faeces.

If not properly treated, the mite infestations can severely compromise the health of the native animals, affecting their vision and ability to eat. They then become progressively weaker and suffer a slow, excruciating death. And because mange is so highly contagious, it also affects entire populations of wombats – making the challenge for wildlife carers even more difficult.

“We will get a report of a wombat with mange and then when we go to the property and set up cameras, we end up finding so many more wombats that are also suffering,” Melinda says. “In the last two years, since starting mange treatments under the title of Kanimbla Wombats, we have treated over 200 wombats for mange. Anna has been treating it for years though, so that number is actually a lot higher.”

So how did these two volunteers get the idea to give old political corflutes a practical new purpose?

“Wombat carers across Australia have been using mange flaps to treat mange for decades,” Melinda says. “It’s such a simple but effective way to treat a wombat in their natural habitat.”

“We usually approach local real estate agents to ask them for their old corflutes, but after the election, I saw so many political posters around the place, I put a call out on social media for people to donate them and we received hundreds.”



Top image: Melinda Kerr (left) and Anna Culliton are on a mission to help NSW's struggling wombats
All photos courtesy of Kanimbla Wombats

THE CHALLENGES

to help wombats

Melinda and Anna use the corflutes to create a flap that goes at the front of a wombat's burrow. When the animal walks through the flap, their movement causes a medication (which has been carefully attached to the corflute in a cup) to tip onto their backs.

The pour-on treatment is called moxidectin (commonly known as Cydectin), and each affected wombat need a weekly treatment for about 12 weeks. Melinda and Anna continue to monitor the animals using camera traps and they top up the flaps weekly until the full treatment cycle has been completed. They also mix the Cydectin with blue food colouring so that they can easily identify which sick wombats have received their doses.

If all goes well and the marsupials have recovered by the end of their 12-week treatment, the flaps can then be removed.

However, just like humans, wombats can be quite stubborn and determined when they want to be, so things don't always go to plan!

"We have to replace flaps a lot," Melinda says. "Wombats are pretty cheeky; they are also really inquisitive. So when we put flaps in front of their burrows, they often pull them down and chew on them. It isn't a perfect system and the wombats miss their doses a lot by tipping the treatment on the ground, but it is the best system we have at the moment."

However, she adds that one of the things she loves about wombats is the fact that they have so much character.

"They are smart and always keep me on my toes," she says warmly. "They are also really loving – watching mother wombats interact and care for their babies in camera trap footage is one of my favourite parts of our work."

Aside from the wombats not always cooperating in their own recovery plan, Melinda and Anna have also been dealing with an even bigger challenge in recent months, and that's the astonishing level of above-average rainfall and subsequent flooding events this year.

"The Kanimbla Valley is on the edge of the Central West and the Blue Mountains, and we have unfortunately experienced a lot of flooding, including flooded wombat burrows," Melinda explains. "In other places, the flooding has led to landslips that have caused burrows to collapse.

"When wombats' habitat is affected, it causes a lot of stress to them and that can make them sicker. Even if they don't already have mange, the additional stress they experience lowers their immune system and this makes them more susceptible to getting mange. With the wet weather and burrow collapses, it has also made it harder for us to find our sick wombats to treat them."

This all sounds like pretty tough going, but Melinda and Anna are passionate about their work, and they know they are helping not just bare-nosed wombats in need, but the natural environment they live in too.

"My favourite fact about wombats is just how big of a role they play in our ecosystem," Melinda says.

"They play a big role in biodiversity, in particular soil health. Soil health is important for the health of all organisms and by digging burrows wombats shift on average 46 to 93 tonnes of soil a year, aerating the soil and promoting the growth of smaller plant life." 🐾



If you'd like to learn more about Melinda and Anna's work, check out the Kanimbla Wombats Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/kanimblawombats/> or visit Instagram at: <https://www.instagram.com/kanimblawombats>

Kanimbla Wombats t-shirts are also for sale through Katoomba tees: <https://bluemountainstshirts.com.au/products/kanimbla-wombats-t-shirt>

Each t-shirt sold funds one week's treatment for a wombat suffering from mange.

Kanimbla Wombats also accepts donations at: <https://kanimblawombats.com.au/donate>



ASAV accredited hospitals

The ASAV Accredited Veterinary Hospital Scheme recognises companion animal practices that achieve the highest levels of quality care and practice management in innovative hospital facilities. Those hospitals that gain accreditation set a benchmark to inspire other small animal practitioners when assessing their own facilities and standards. It also operates as a kind of quality assurance program for clients, promoting excellence in three main areas: medical records, radiological records and the facility itself.



Eltham Central Veterinary Hospital

Eltham Central Veterinary Hospital is a huge small animal practice in the leafy suburb of Eltham, about 20 kms north east of Melbourne's CBD. It's one of two hospitals in the Diamond Valley Veterinary Hospitals group owned by Dr Joseph Galbally and two of his veterinary colleagues, Drs Deanna Crea and Sarah Trewartha. The three partners also own another hospital called Montmorency Veterinary Hospital, which is conveniently located about 5 kms away in a neighbouring suburb.

Joseph is the longest serving partner in the veterinary business and he says they still

have a photo of the founding owner, Dr Chris Barton, in both hospitals.

Chris established the original clinic called Research Veterinary Clinic in a shopfront building in the suburb of Research. Within just two years, he had gone on to build a purpose-built stand-alone clinic in Research and also established a small shopfront branch clinic in Montmorency.

Joseph and Chris became business partners in 1990 and for a time they had an equine vet partner as well.

In the late nineties, the pair started exploring options for renovating or relocating the original Research Veterinary Clinic to a much larger site.

"In 1995 we purchased a stand-alone property in Montmorency, substantially gutted and renovated it and relocated the Montmorency branch clinic there in 1996 effectively establishing the much larger,

purpose-designed Montmorency Veterinary Hospital," Joseph says.

A few years later, they purchased a large block of land in Eltham, the suburb between Research and Montmorency, and built their



Dr Joseph Galbally

new hospital, Eltham Central Veterinary Hospital, which opened in December 2001.

Joseph is still very proud of the building today: “The architectural design, while reflecting the natural aesthetic of the green and tree-dense amenity of the Eltham suburb, is a stunning landmark building for this beautiful suburban landscape,” he says.

He and Chris even won an international veterinary design award for their hospital from a US professional trade magazine called *Veterinary Economics*, back in 2002.

“We were the first non-American veterinary hospital to win that prestigious award, he says. “So it was quite an achievement – an absolute honour. We didn’t just win it purely on the design, but all the philosophy about it.

“A lot of the focus of the building design was to blend in with the natural landscape and architectural heritage of Eltham. Our builder was very committed to the green philosophy and emphasis in our hospital building project.

“It had to blend in with the amenity of the area, look very Eltham, and it was very similar in style to that of the signature Eltham architectural heritage.

“We also wanted something that our staff would enjoy and where they would be enticed to stay and to not be keen to go home at the end of the day!”

Joseph says that he must give credit for the building to his former partner Chris, who spent a lot of time researching veterinary clinics when they were in the planning stage, and that Chris even went to the US and looked at vet hospitals there.

Today the thriving business is comprised of about 25 staff, including 10 vets, a large team of vet nurses and a groomer, all shared across both hospital sites.

“Eltham Central Veterinary Hospital would probably draw upon one and a half or twice the number of resources (plus administrative staff and a groomer) as Montmorency Veterinary Hospital on a day-to-day basis,” Joseph says.

All of the vet nurses are highly experienced with Certificate IV (or above) qualifications, and some of them also have higher-level management responsibilities at the hospital.

Joseph says that he and his partners’ focus – from both a staff and client perspective – is for team members to have the consistency of usually working at one or the other of the two hospitals, – but they do have some flexibility with this, so that staff are given the opportunity and experience of seeing how the other hospital works.

“With this flexibility of sharing and swapping our vets and vet nurses between our two hospital sites, the staff also get to mix with other people in the practice so it’s not a

separation mindset of: ‘We’re at this hospital and you’re at the other hospital,’ he adds.

Having two vet hospitals located nearby to each other also means that team members can support each other if one hospital gets particularly busy on any given day. Joseph says sometimes they might ask a vet at the less-busy location to go help out at the other site, and/or they may also even suggest clients go and see one of the vets at their other location, if their usual vet is booked out.

When asked about the clientele at Eltham Central, Joseph describes it as “... a mainly middle-class, family-oriented demographic with a mix of professional and business owner clients represented by a large proportion of young to middle-aged people, as well as an established mix of senior aged clients, all being very much generous, considerate and caring pet lovers.”

As for the patients, Joseph reports that it’s mainly cats and dogs (roughly 50/50 of each) but they also treat rabbits, guinea pigs, the occasional cage birds and a little bit of backyard poultry.

While both hospitals have all the same equipment and have exactly the same professional standards and protocols, only the larger Eltham Central Veterinary Hospital is ASAV accredited because the Montmorency building, which Joseph describes as more “boutique” in style, has some physical constraints which would require significant structural alterations for it to comply with the ASAV hospital accreditation standards.

Their purpose-built hospital in Eltham was actually first accredited in 2002 and has been re-accredited every four years since then, so professional excellence is well and truly embedded into the team culture.

As new staff have joined the team over the years, they too have been taught to follow the same rigorous standards and Joseph says this consistency in how things are done is very helpful from a management perspective.

“With accreditation, it makes it easier as a business to run your hospital because you have all these set standards in place so that you must do it this way and do it that way,” he explains. “You know that everything is uniform and set to those standards, rather than just having someone do things one way and someone else doing them another way.”

Eltham Central was most recently re-accredited in May 2022, although the lion’s share of the work for it was completed last year.

Joseph recalls that it was more difficult than previous re-accreditations, primarily because COVID was once again ripping through Melbourne, and with the pet boom still in full swing, the vet hospital was busier than ever.

“When you’ve got two hospitals isolated because of COVID, staff being separated, and managing COVID, it was very, very hard. Because our focus, obviously, was managing COVID – every day there were directives coming out from the Victorian government and we had to brief our staff on every new change and challenge with COVID.



Dr Sarah Trewartha



Dr Deanna Crea

“And then, on top of COVID, you bring in another layer of having to manage the re-accreditation process, which was very, very important to us as partners and directors of the hospital, and also just as important to the veterinary staff, and particularly those who had been with us for a long time, to get our re-accreditation ... It just added another challenging layer of how we were going to do it on top of COVID. Because by then, everyone in the industry was, as you know, exhausted.”

So how did they do it?

Joseph says he was very fortunate to have a very close friend and highly experienced professional colleague (who also happens

to do a lot of work with the AVA), to help him organise and manage communications with staff about what was required for the re-accreditation and when.

“I also had very dedicated vets who knew how difficult the process was, and knew we had to manage it as a team, all put up their hands to do things,” he adds. “And in the background, even without me having to ask for it, I had vet nurses at different levels that were doing things to prepare for our re-accreditation.”

While there no major obstacles or setbacks to the hospital earning re-accreditation again, Joseph does mention that there was some minor maintenance work that they needed to complete, which was also more challenging this time around because of COVID.

“I think there were only a few physical things we had to do to the building, like re-painting lines in our car park, some of those maintenance things that were generally easy to do pre-COVID ... but when you have to organise things or try to find people who are available to do things during all the disruptions it was very hard to organise.”

When the time finally came for the big inspection day, the ASAV hospital inspector turned out to be none other than Dr Adrian Choi, a very well-known and highly respected vet from Melbourne.

“He’s done our inspection before,” Joseph says. “He’s lovely – very warm, very engaging, just a magnetic personality.”

Despite a little apprehension from some of their vets and nursing team, the hospital site inspection went well without any interruption to the management and flow of the hospital’s usual daily schedule. Before Adrian left, he sat down for a convivial chat and discussion about his inspection, as well as sharing a couple of tips from his own practice.

Joseph remembers that Adrian commented on Eltham Central’s medical records for patients receiving vaccinations. He observed that with Eltham Central’s medical records, when doing a vaccination for a patient, some but not all of their vets did what his vets comply with as a set standard in his practice. He said that he finds in his hospital it’s really helpful if the vets specifically write down what and when the next vaccination should be, rather than just making a note in the record that a particular vaccine was given.

He explains that this just makes it quick and easy, if someone else is on duty and picks up the patient next time, they can see immediately when and what particular vaccine is next due, even though that information would be on the patient’s vaccination reminder list as well.

“And in terms of our monitoring equipment, he suggested to double up on one particular monitoring unit, so that we have not only

got one in our operating rooms but we have also got another one immediately accessible out in our hospital treatment area,” he adds. “So if you need it, you’ve got a second one immediately accessible right there.”

As Joseph continues to talk about accreditation and re-accreditation the thing that comes across most clearly is the immense pride and satisfaction it gives Joseph every day to be running an ASAV Hospital of Excellence.

“I like taking pride in saying that we have an ASAV accredited hospital,” he says. That pride of having attained, in my opinion, the highest hospital accredited standards in the world. I mention that to my friends and everyone – I always put that out there.

“Having that pride and recognition of ASAV hospital accreditation status, the really satisfying follow-on is our staff also being proud of that, and our clients knowing and feeling comfortable and confident that they’re coming to a place with the highest standards ... And I’ve had new clients who have come from other distant suburbs who say the sole reason they chose us is because they saw that we had an accredited standard. They checked out what that standard meant and that was important to them.”

So what would his advice be to other vets thinking about going down the same path?

“I think it is something that any people taking over management in a hospital – or even existing managers in a hospital – should seriously consider,” Joseph replies.

“Because if the infrastructure in your hospital is of an accredited standard, you really are professionally insuring yourself at the highest level.

“If you have any potential litigation or any question about how your patients have been treated, by having those standards (and not just having those standards but through re-accreditation being seen to be following those standards), you are in good stead to survive any disastrous and potentially litigious thing that could happen.

“For example, if a patient came in and had a procedure done, you’d know from the very start, that everything’s been explained to the client, consent forms have been completed properly (and not only been signed off but explained verbally to the client), admission information has been put in and recorded carefully, and all the anaesthetic protocols and so on have been complied with. And, because you are following all those standards, you are less likely to be vulnerable to peer criticism or litigation if some adverse situation or outcome occurred.

“I think it gives you a sense of security and professional and ethical comfort knowing that you have those standards.”

Joseph also points out that having to maintain professional standards and make sure they’re constantly up-to-date in order to earn re-accreditation is also very useful, “rather than just setting them in place, and then 20 years later realising that you’re behind the times!”

It’s almost time to go, but is there anything else Joseph would like to share or mention for this article?

“We really, really take pride in having a longstanding team – people have been with us for many years, some of them decades,” he says.

“And we have a very close group of people who work together for everyone’s mutual benefit and to make work as easy as possible. They have been fabulous, so obliging and helpful through all the constraints that COVID has thrown at us and how intensely busy we are – I am absolutely proud of them all ... There’s no adjective in the *Oxford English Dictionary* or any descriptive phrase that I can use or say that could really show how proud I am of our team and how appreciative I am and respectful of every single person for what they do and contribute to the success of our practice.” 🐾



All photos courtesy of Eltham Central Veterinary Hospital

The first liquid solution for **hypertension**

Semintra® 10 mg/mL Oral Solution for Cats is the first angiotensin receptor blocker licensed for feline hypertension. Its unique, targeted mode of action provides reliable, long-term control of blood pressure.¹ And, as Semintra® is an easy to give liquid formulation, it is well accepted by cats, making administration easy.²



DUAL INDICATION
Semintra®
THE SOLUTION



References: 1. Glaus, T.M., et al. (2019) Efficacy of long-term oral telmisartan treatment in cats with hypertension: results of a prospective European clinical trial. *J Vet Intern Med*, 33(2), 413-422. 2. Zimmering, T. et al. (2015) Effect of Semintra® and owner observations on quality of life in cats with Chronic Kidney Disease - update on cat owner feedback ("EASY Programme"). Poster presentation at SEVC 2015, Barcelona. Boehringer Ingelheim Animal Health Australia Pty. Ltd. Level 1, 78 Waterloo Road, North Ryde, NSW 2113. Semintra® is a registered trademark of Boehringer Ingelheim Vetmedica GmbH – used under licence.

HAPPY ENDING



BRAVE BLACK CAT DEFIES THE ODDS AND BECOMES A SYMBOL OF HOPE FOR OTHER ANIMALS IN NEED

In a heartwarming story out of the US, a community cat* in Pennsylvania called Buddy has not only survived a brutal attack by two dogs, but also become a kind of feline fundraising superstar for the Pennsylvania SPCA (PSPCA).

Buddy's terrifying ordeal began when two boys deliberately set their dogs loose on him as he was enjoying the sunshine outside a home in Philadelphia's Frankford area.

The owner of the property where the attack happened was home, quickly intervened, and managed to stop the mauling in the nick of time.

ACCT Philly (Animal Care and Control Team) were called and Buddy was rushed first to the PSPCA and then BluePearl Pet Hospital, where emergency vet Dr Katie Venanzi swung into action.

At first, Buddy was only faintly responsive and she feared the critically injured black cat might not survive. But as she gently began to treat his wounds, something wonderful happened.

Buddy somehow found the strength to thump his tail on the table and growl at the veterinary staff!

Dr Venanzi told *The Washington Post* that at that moment she realised she had a bit of a fighter in front of her and says: "I thought, 'This cat might make it!'"

Her instincts were spot on.

Buddy survived his first night in the veterinary hospital and then another and another, but his life-threatening injuries meant he still needed to be monitored around the clock.

While Buddy was fighting for his life, the PSPCA shared his story with the media. A video of the appalling incident which had been captured on a surveillance camera soon went viral online.

Animal lovers and well-wishers flocked to the PSPCA Facebook page to get the latest Buddy news and donate to the cost of his medical care. Before long, the badly injured black cat had become something of an international celebrity.

"I think people were outraged by what they saw, and I think they also were rooting for Buddy," said Gillian Kocher, director of public relations for the PSPCA.

"He's been through a lot, but he's kind of a symbol – not just for hope and recovery, but he's saying to other cats that hopefully this won't

happen to them," she added.

To date, the PSPCA has received hundreds of thousands of dollars in donations from around the world to Buddy's fundraising page. The shelter's "Save Every Buddy," movement, as well as slogan T-shirts raised an additional \$30,000 US for the organisation.

The donations and merchandise sales have been more than enough to pay for Buddy's medical care and the surplus funds raised will now go to cover care for other sick and injured cats in the care of the PSPCA.

Ms Kocher said the public response to Buddy's story has been extraordinary.

"It was just amazing," she said. "There really are no words on the outpouring of support just for this one animal. Obviously, he's a cat, but he really was kind of an underdog."

Since being discharged from the vet hospital, Buddy was fostered and subsequently adopted by Dr Venanzi, the emergency vet who treated him in those crucial first hours after the attack, along with her husband Dave. 🐾



*In the US, "community cats" are cats that have been "TNR'd", or trapped, neutered/spayed, and then returned to the field. Often times people will feed/water them as part of a colony.

Editor's note: The two boys (aged 12 and 17) who allegedly encouraged the attack on Buddy have been charged with a number of criminal offences, including felony aggravated animal cruelty, animal fighting, and conspiracy. They will face juvenile court for their actions. The two dogs involved in the incident were signed over to the Pennsylvania SPCA and have since found loving new forever homes.

Photos courtesy of PSPCA

Be who you are and do what you love!



Greencross
Vets

We are thrilled to announce that Greencross are the first official Platinum Sponsor of Australian Rainbow Vets and Allies! ARVA is the only organisation in Australia providing support, advocacy, education and events for LGBTIQ+ people in the veterinary industry.

Diversity and inclusion are an integral part of the great culture at Greencross, and we have been continuously assessing how we can better support our team members. We are committed to ensuring veterinary professionals feel supported every day of the year, and our sponsorship will enable ARVA to boost their activity and presence.

About Australian Rainbow Vets and Allies

Founded six years ago, ARVA is the leading LGBTIQ+ organisation in the veterinary industry in Australia. Over those six years ARVA has a track record of delivering support, advocacy and education for veterinary professionals locally and internationally. We are extremely excited to work with such a wonderful organisation and we encourage our veterinary community to embrace and support ARVA.

Support and connect with ARVA:

Join ARVA (Membership options available for individuals who identify as LGBTIQ+ and allies who wish to support ARVA but may not identify as LGBTIQ+, everyone is welcome!)

Follow ARVA on LinkedIn & Instagram @AusRainbowVets

Connect with ARVA in their private Facebook groups.

- o **Australian Rainbow Vets:** Individuals must identify as LGBTIQ+ to join this group
- o **Australian Rainbow Veterinarians and Allies:** No identification requirement but need to be involved in the veterinary industry



Connect with us!

Get the latest news and industry updates at our new exclusive veterinary hub on social, a channel dedicated to all vets and nurses! Find us now on socials @GreencrossVeterinaryHub

For more information visit greencrossvets.com.au



@GreencrossVeterinaryHub



Save the date!

The Star Gold Coast, QLD
7-10 August 2023

Gruel, guts and gonads

2023 ASAV Conference
Together with Reproduction



KNOWLEDGE

