No hoof, no Donkey

Donkeys are unique animals, and their lovable faces and gentle intelligent natures soon bring a smile to those who meet them. Murdoch University Veterinary Hospital was recently visited by Gucci, an American Mediterranean Miniature Donkey, who was soon making friends, especially when saying hello in her distinctive manner to anyone who passed by. Gucci and her friend Prada, another miniature donkey, often entertain their owners with their inquisitive and playful characters.

Sharon McCormick, Gucci’s owner, noticed that Gucci was reluctant to place any weight on her leg after catching the top of her hoof in a fence. Sharon says, “there were concerns that the hoof was separating from the leg which is very serious and could mean the loss of her hoof and ultimately the loss of our little donkey. We were determined that we must be able to do something for her, and even researched prosthetic hooves on the internet”. After a visit to her local vet Gucci was referred to Murdoch University Equine Centre.

Donkeys can scare horses, so Gucci was slipped in through the back door, but when a donkey decides to be vocal their bray can carry up to three kilometres! Her stall neighbours and staff in nearby rooms soon knew that Gucci had arrived. Murdoch Veterinarians were concerned that the wire had prevented blood from flowing to the hoof and Gucci was evaluated at a severe grade 4 out of 5 lameness level. Dr Rachael Smith, a specialist in equine surgery, diagnosed that the coronary band had separated from the hoof wall. Gucci’s foot was wrapped and the toe of the hoof was trimmed to help Gucci walk a little more comfortably.

Dr Smith also noted a shearing effect; the coronary band and the new tissue underneath were rubbing against each other which wasn’t helping the repair process. It was recommended that Gucci undergo surgery to remove the separated tissue.

Under general anaesthesia, Dr Smith removed a third of the frog and the medial and lateral heels along with all dead and unhealthy tissue until normal, healthy laminae tissue was reached. Gucci was bandaged up and recovered from her anaesthesia without incident.

Gucci was discharged three days after her surgery with Doctor’s orders to rest in a small yard and to regularly replace the bandage (which turned out to be a three person job) until the new tissue had formed and hardened. Keeping Gucci’s bandaged area clean was a tricky task but with a bit of creativity and a set of dog running shoes, this was taken care of and Gucci was bearing weight on her hoof and running around with Prada within a few weeks.

Sharon says, “Gucci’s hoof has grown back and looks almost normal again. We are very grateful for the work of Dr Smith and the staff at Murdoch, and are relieved that our little donkey is running around with her friend Prada again. Our plan for the future is to breed with both girls.”
Kane now breathing easier

Pet owners know how distressing a sick pet can be, and for those who have had the unfortunate and frightening experience of feeling helpless in the face of their animal friend’s health issues, an experienced and friendly veterinarian can make all the difference.

Kane, a 14 year old blue heeler, and much loved pet of Leanne and Alan Forsyth, was referred to Murdoch Veterinary Hospital after suffering respiratory distress as a result of laryngeal paralysis and collapse. Kane was extremely unwell on arriving at Murdoch and required intensive management in ICU overnight.

After many tests, Kane’s overall health risks were considered and he underwent surgery to receive a permanent tracheostomy by Registered Specialist in Small Animal Surgery, Professor Giselle Hosgood. Professor Hosgood has an international reputation for her many contributions of groundbreaking clinical research in small animal surgery, and is a highly regarded surgeon as well as a noted speaker at scientific meetings.

A tracheostomy is a surgical procedure where a new opening is made through the neck into the trachea, assisting the passage of air into the lungs. The new opening would help Kane breathe through this window rather than struggling to breathe through his nose and mouth.

Kane recovered well from his surgery and was discharged three days after arriving at Murdoch. Unfortunately Kane was admitted twice more over the next week as a result of anxiety and distress due to a severe storm and fires phobia. With thunder storms over, Kane was in good spirits, bright, active and was maintaining a good appetite and was discharged with a storm management plan in place.

As Kane will now have a permanent opening in his trachea, dust particles, insects and other small materials could possibly reach his lungs. Initially Kane was allowed small walks in a dust free and non-windy environment to allow his respiratory tract to acclimatise with the environment. Long term and ongoing care will ensure that Kane remains healthy. This includes never being able to exercise unattended or jump in water as water could enter his lungs through the tracheostomy site.

Kane’s owner Leanne Forsyth says, “I am so thankful to everyone at Murdoch for all their help and compassion. It was really appreciated at such a stressful time. Kane is doing very well and enjoying life. His treatment at Murdoch has given him a second chance at life and he is enjoying just being Kane”.

Behind the scenes - research

Infectious diseases in animals and humans are emerging at an increasing pace due to a growing international society. It has never been more important to identify, monitor and control diseases as they occur.

Lyme borreliosis and zoonotic babesiosis are two such diseases that Murdoch University’s Associate Professor Peter Irwin is researching. Lyme disease is an infection of humans and dogs usually transmitted via the bite of an infected tick, and babesiosis is also occasionally transmitted to people by ticks. Both diseases were thought not to occur in Australia, but Dr Irwin and research colleague

Dr Andrea Paparini were part of a team that recently identified babesiosis in a Canberra man. This discovery was published in the Medical Journal of Australia in March this year. “There is also growing evidence that Lyme borreliosis may occur in this country,” said Dr Irwin, who hopes that dogs may hold the key to the mystery surrounding this potentially debilitating disease. Untreated, Lyme borreliosis can cause chronic fatigue, skin conditions, aches, pains and may also affect the brain and heart.

Dr Peter Irwin is a specialist at Murdoch University School of Veterinary and Biomedical Sciences. His area of expertise is the diagnosis of medical disorders of dogs and cats, particularly endocrine and neurological conditions, and his research interests lie in vector-borne diseases of dogs, wildlife – and now people!

Dr Irwin who is heading a study into Lyme borreliosis, says, “in areas where Lyme disease is endemic and recognised, such as parts of Northern America, Europe and Asia, dogs are also often infected by the same bacteria, Borrelia. It is assumed that because we don’t have the same ticks as in the northern hemisphere we don’t have Borrelia, but we may have an organism that is related and causes Lyme like symptoms.”

Dr Irwin is testing the dogs owned by humans with a tentative diagnosis of Lyme disease, as well as dogs in eastern coastal Australia where the climate is perfect for ticks but where the bacteria responsible for a Lyme-like syndrome in people have not been found. A lack of diagnostic services for Lyme in Australia means the disease is nearly impossible to detect accurately. Dr Irwin says, “it is difficult to diagnose Lyme because there is no single definitive blood test you can do. There are many tests which give bits of an answer but nothing conclusive”

“Interestingly, the research questions concerning babesiosis are very similar to those associated with Lyme borreliosis” says Dr Irwin. “We had no idea that this form of babesiosis, caused by a rodent parasite that normally occurs in the northern hemisphere, was here in Australia until we confirmed it in a person who had lived in coastal New South Wales most of their life. To answer the all-important questions about their life cycles and natural history, we will need to examine ticks and small mammal species around Australia”.

The research may be a step towards settling a controversial topic over 20 years old in the case of Lyme disease, and opens up new areas of exciting research in the case of babesiosis.
Beyond the textbooks

The extensive experience of the veterinarians at the Murdoch University Veterinary Hospital is tested every day by the wide range of cases that are presented. The variety of referral services available to veterinarians means that on any one day the patient could be a cat, dog, horse, bird, snake, native or exotic animal or just about any other animal you can find throughout Western Australia.

As veterinary students progress through their course at Murdoch, they too will learn about many species. Not only do they aim to be able to treat whatever crosses their path when they graduate, but as the students progress through their veterinary education, they discover if they have a special interest within the veterinary profession. Students at Murdoch organise a wide range of special interest groups to coordinate speakers and workshops about a range of specialty fields.

Who can resist an opportunity to hear about wildlife rescues and be involved in some fantastic hands-on events? This guarantees the Murdoch University Wildlife Association (MUWA) is a favourite group at Murdoch. One event held for MUWA last year was a speaker from the WA Conservation of Raptors group who discussed the challenges involved in the rehabilitation and release of raptors and a demonstration of the training of owls. Other opportunities ranged from volunteering with penguins, visiting a wildlife rehabilitation sanctuary, and trips to the Eagles Raptor Rehabilitation Centre and Armadale Reptile Centre.

The Veterinary Business Management Association (VBMA) aims to provide students with knowledge about business and management skills, job searching and professional communication skills prior to graduation. The organisers aim to provide activities that are informative and provide practical information for students who may be interested in running their own veterinary business in the future. The theme for their annual conference was “Starting a Business from Scratch”.

The Murdoch Animal Welfare Society (MAWS) organised speakers covering topics such as donkey welfare in outback Australia, the K9 search and rescue unit and animal welfare during natural disasters with a focus on the Christchurch earthquake.

Students with a special interest in horses can join the Equine Interest Group (EIG). Last year’s events included a presentation and opportunity to practice vetting for endurance rides. Another major event was a dental workshop which covered basic procedures and the equipment used. Those with an interest in horses will be aware that horses’ teeth require a lot of maintenance and equine dentistry is a specialised field.

The Bovine Interest Group (BIG) had a busy year with the first event a trip to the Muchea Sale Yards. These are the major sale yards for WA and can hold up to 5,000 cattle and 20,000 sheep at one time. For many members, this was their first opportunity to see animals at a live auction. BIG’s major event for the year was the rural practice weekend. Activities included an obstetrics lab, an eye enucleation workshop and an udder health workshop. The year’s events concluded with an artificial insemination workshop where the theory behind using AI for breeding herds was discussed.

Many veterinary students are particularly excited about surgery and like to get involved as soon as they can. This means the Murdoch Association of Veterinary Surgery (MAVS) is a popular group. The objective of MAVS is to provide students with opportunities to learn to suture and other basic surgical principles prior to learning them in class so they are confident and have increased proficiency when they learn about surgical techniques. Future events for MAVS will include surgical decision making, post operative bandaging and orthopaedic technique.
Pain Clinic

No owner wants their injured or sick pet to be in pain, and because they can’t tell us when something is wrong it is often hard to know when or how much an animal is hurting. The correct management of your furry friend’s pain can not only improve their quality of life but also increase the amount of time you have with them.

Dr Griet Haitjema is a registered specialist in veterinary anaesthesia and a qualified veterinary acupuncturist. She also heads the Pain Clinic at Murdoch University Veterinary Hospital.

Pain management for hospitalised patients and patients recovering from injuries, surgery and other procedures begins following an assessment which determines the cause, level, type and duration of pain. A successful program can include a range of treatments including medications and acupuncture.

One treatment utilised at Murdoch Veterinary Hospital is acupuncture which has been used for thousands of years as a way to control pain and healing mechanisms in the body. As well as pain relief it can be used to treat a variety of diseases including musculoskeletal problems.

Windy, a patient of the Pain Clinic has elbow dysplasia and was unable to jump into the car and becomes lame after going to the beach. She became irritable with other dogs and appeared depressed.

Windy was the first patient to have her pain measured by a newly arrived piece of equipment at the hospital. With the help of generous donors to the Murdoch University Veterinary Trust, a Pressure Rate Onset Device (PRO-D) was purchased. The PRO-D objectively measures the hypersensitivity aspect of pain simply and easily by giving a digital reading of the pain threshold of the patient. When the measurements of the device are considered over the course of the treatment plan, the pain measurement can determine if the treatment is successful.

Dr Haitjema says, "our patients can’t tell us how they feel and assessment in stoic dogs such as Windy is a challenge. With the PRO-D, we can objectively measure the level of pain hypersensitivity which allows us to better assess which pain medications and treatments are effective."

While an owner understanding the signs of pain in their pet will always remain important, animals will often be silent about their pain. This equipment will help validate the owner’s observations and interpret the animal’s unique behaviour and tolerance of pain.

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With your support we are one step closer to funding the next research breakthrough, preparing new veterinarians to care for different kinds of animals, and providing the equipment and expertise that could save a pet’s life.

As technology and standards of veterinary care advance, the Vet Trust can help Murdoch University Veterinary Hospital utilise new technologies and equipment to offer even more treatment options. Donations can help purchase items such as a C-arm, providing low x-ray dose, high quality surgical imaging able to be performed in the operating room which would minimise complications for our patients.

Your financial contribution will not only help the patients of the Murdoch University Veterinary Hospital, but will help a new generation of veterinarians who will learn the latest techniques and practices, and hence improve the health and welfare of animals into the future.