



Veterinary Nursing students support charity veterinary clinic in Tonga

Laura Harvey Dip. VN Angela Gussey Dip. VN
Rebecca Ladyman BVSc, Unitec, NZ

What started off as an idea very quickly became reality as ten veterinary nursing students, two veterinarians and four Unitec staff (two veterinary nurses, one veterinarian and one support person) gathered at Auckland Airport in the early hours of a Friday morning bound for Tonga.

The trip was part of a South Pacific Animal Welfare (SPAW) desexing and vaccination clinic. SPAW organise various clinics in

the South Pacific, asking veterinarians and veterinary nurses to volunteer their time to provide much needed veterinary care to islands with no regular veterinary service.

What a fantastic way, we thought, to both help animals desperately in need, and give our students some great practical experience.

After landing in Nuku'alofa, there was no time to lose. We were met at the airport

by local police, SPAW's on-island support person – Zettie, and our transport for the week. It was straight to the clinic to prepare for the week.

With Zettie's help, we quickly got the clinic ready for Saturday morning. The clinic is run from an old doctors' surgery, so when the veterinary clinic isn't being run, all of the supplies and equipment are locked away in a closet. A multitude of drugs, boxes of needles, syringes, surgical gloves, scales, autoclave, boxes of bandaging material, a large animal visit box, and much more, was all packed into a small space. It was a feat trying to get everything out (and then getting it all to fit back in at the end of the week!). For a small pacific island, the clinic was bigger and better stocked than we expected, but still lacking a few items we would consider essential here.

There is no anaesthetic machine, no oxygen, and no monitoring equipment. There is no way to source and maintain items on Tonga. Wow – this would sure make for an experience never to be forgotten. Saturday

Above: The Unitec team - 10 students, 3 lecturers, 2 vets and a media support person.

morning bought a few surgeries and consults. Out first patient was a pig, which was an interesting start however, we were not too busy. This won't be too bad we all thought. Wow - were we in for a shock come Monday.

Saturday afternoon was swim time. We were all in need of a cool off. The heat was already beginning to take its toll. High heat and high humidity = a lot of sweat.

Sunday is a religious day in Tonga, with only the bakeries open, so off we all went to a stunning resort island for a day on the beach and some snorkelling. We could get used to this!

Monday came, and the onslaught began. 45,000 text messages had been sent out announcing our arrival along with radio advertising.

We had planned to have half the students' do a morning shift, and the other half do the afternoon shift, so the students would all get a bit of time to relax and enjoy the sun. We very quickly realised this wasn't going to happen. With the number of surgeries and consults that kept coming in the doors, we would need to whole team all day, every day.

Under the supervision of the qualified veterinary nurses and veterinarians, our students were able to do full vaccination consults, something not possible here in New Zealand. Medical cases got a full workup by the students, then a diagnosis and treatment plan decided by one of the veterinarians, then implemented by the students.

Total intravenous anaesthesia was a foreign concept to the students, who are used to inhalation anaesthesia. This meant their hands on monitoring skills and observations were vital to maintaining adequate surgical anaesthesia. With just a bit of confirmation and very little input needed from staff and veterinarians, the students were calculating, preparing and administering premeds, inserting IV catheters, inducing anaesthesia, intubating, maintaining anaesthesia, and monitoring and recovering patients.

Given the limited facilities and the large number of animals being seen, students were often placing IV catheters in odd situations – sitting on the floor with poor lighting, on the back of a ute, in a waiting room with owners watching!

Monday through Thursday also brought with it the village visits. This involved a veterinar-



Top: Dr Geoff Neale and student Wendy Thornton neuter a dog in a rural Tongan village.

Centre: Student Chelsea Woodall and lecturer Laura Harvey examine a litter of puppies prior to vaccination.

Bottom: Dr Kim Telford and student Nicole Tantau Henry examine a dog in the back of a van.

ian and a couple of students going out with the Tonga Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) to small villages on the island to vaccinate and desex animals that couldn't get to the clinic. Desexing on tables outside, with children gathered around the surgery table sure was a unique experience.

117 surgeries in five and a half days made for one very exhausting, very rewarding experience that I think we would all jump at the opportunity to do again.

This clinic was hopefully the first of many that Unitec and SPAW will conduct together.

Dr's Kim Telford and Rebecca Ladyman, and students Lorna Crouth and Chelsea Woodall treat a litter of dehydrated puppies.



Farewell to Jo Robinson

At the beginning of 2014, after eight years on council, Jo Robinson has stepped down from her position with the NZVNA. Jo has given a huge amount of time and energy to the association; holding multiple positions on council, most recently as secretary, vice president and sponsorship liaison.

We'd like to thank Jo for her time, effort and commitment. She's helped move our association forward and the hard work and involvement she's had will continue into the future. We know these roles require the support of families and often employers; we thank both Provet and Hamish for assisting Jo.

We'd like to take this opportunity to personally thank Jo for her organisational skills and fantastic representation of our association, recently often the face that our fantastic sponsors would see. Her passion and hard work will leave a gap in our team.