

South Pacific Animal Welfare

By **Courtney Spencer**
RVN, Vetcare Glen Innes

South Pacific Animal Welfare (SPAW) is a New Zealand charity that runs temporary veterinary clinics on several islands in the South Pacific, including Tonga. In December 2017, SPAW, in conjunction with Unitec Institute of Technology, ran a week-long clinic in Nuku'alofa, Tonga. The clinic provides services including desexing, parasite control and vaccinations. The team consisted of fourteen Diploma in Veterinary Nursing students, four veterinarians and four support staff (three Unitec lecturers and one veterinary nurse).

Our team departed Auckland on Friday morning. It was an early start, but we were all so excited and couldn't wait to get to Tonga. Once we arrived, we went to our accommodation and spent the rest of the day settling in.

On Saturday we spent the morning at the local markets, then headed off to the clinic after lunch to set up. As the clinic is only used a few times a year, a good clean out was required before we set up our equipment. For several Diploma students, including myself, this was the second combined SPAW and Unitec trip we had

participated in, so we already knew what to expect. For those who hadn't been, this was the first time they were able to see the environment we would be working in.

The clinic consists of two surgery rooms - one had proper (but old) surgery tables, so this was our main surgery room. Our second room was for surgery, drug storage and cleaning surgical equipment. In here, we had two fold-up tables on bricks to make them the right height for the veterinarians. The hospital area was outside. This outside area was multipurpose and would be used for treating sick patients, administering vaccinations and parasite treatments, and would also be where patients were recovered post operatively.

The equipment available was also very limited; kits were basic and in short supply, and we had no diagnostic equipment. There was no anaesthetic machine, instead we used total intravenous anaesthesia (TIVA). We were lucky to have an autoclave, however, we would also be utilising cold sterilisation. Setting up the clinic was definitely an eye-opener for the students,



Above: (from left to right) Sandra Gensch, Dr Geoff Neal and Courtney Spencer with their patient after a successful amputation surgery

Courtney is a registered veterinary nurse currently employed at a small animal practice in Auckland. She graduated with a Diploma in Veterinary Nursing at Unitec in 2014 and also completed a Bachelor of Applied Science in Animal Management and Welfare in 2018.

it was clear that this would not be a standard week's work!

In the evening we had a run through of the plan for the week. Students were separated into groups on a rotating roster for the week: hospital, surgery and field visits, allowing everyone to have a turn in each area. We went over the drug procedures and the tasks that each role required. The hospital nurses would greet incoming clients and establish why they were there.

Hospital cases primarily involve providing parasite treatment to patients, treating sick animals, vaccinating, and educating clients on animal care. Surgery cases were primarily for desexing. The surgery nurse was responsible for caring for their patient from admit to discharge. This involved tasks that would not normally be performed by a student, such as intubation and intravenous (IV) catheterisation. On Tuesday through to Thursday we ran field visits, where a vet and three to four nurses went to various locations to set up a temporary clinic for the day, or visit farms to check livestock.

Sunday is a religious day so everything on the island shuts down - we were fortunate to be able to catch the ferry over to Pangaimotu Island and spend some time there. A nice relaxing day before the busy week ahead!

On Monday we were all up early and rearing to go. We arrived at the clinic and set up for the day. It wasn't long before our first patients started arriving. Students who had been last year paired up with the new

student volunteers to walk them through their first few patients, allowing the start of the day to flow well. The day passed by rather quickly as there was a constant stream of patients, and by the end of the day everyone had gotten into a rhythm.

Monday was a big learning curve, as for most of the students it was the first time they had done tasks such as intubating and placing IV catheters. After a long day at clinic, we headed back to our accommodation and relaxed. After dinner, we had a meeting to discuss the day's events and allow anyone to ask any questions they had after their first clinic day, allowing any kinks to be sorted for the rest of the week.

Tuesday to Thursday breezed by. With the field clinics operating on these days, it meant that we were down a vet and several student nurses at the clinic. Although we were busy, everyone was working well together, allowing us to get through each day efficiently. Field visits were a bit of a mixed bag; some days were non-stop for them at a temporary clinic that had been set up in a hall, others were at a bit of a slower pace with the team visiting farms, however it gave students the opportunity to see things they normally wouldn't in a clinic. On Wednesday evening we were lucky to be treated to a cultural show and dinner by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Food and Fisheries, and on Thursday we went to a local beach for an afternoon swim.

Friday was our last full day at the clinic, however as field clinics were not operating

that day we had our full team ready for the anticipated busy day. As predicted, it was a rather busy day in both the surgery and hospital areas. Towards the end of the day we had a dog brought in that had been missing for a week. The owner advised us that she had possibly been hit by a car, resulting in a leg wound with an exposed femur. We amputated the leg and sent her home with pain relief and antibiotics. On Friday evening we went to Oholei Beach Resort for a cultural show and dinner to celebrate a successful week.

We were leaving on Saturday evening, so only had a morning clinic for any last-minute patients. We had some desexing surgeries and a few hospital cases needing parasite treatments. Our amputation case from the night before came back for a recheck. It was great to see she was running around, especially as we were all aware that her outcome would have been very different had we not had our clinic operating that week. After our last patient left, we cleaned and packed down the clinic leaving it ready for the next group. We all then went back to our accommodation, packed up and then left for the airport.

Overall, we had a long but rewarding week. Being able to learn things like intubation and IV catheter placement was a massive opportunity, and at the end of the week we were all confident in these tasks. It also gave us a chance to see cases we wouldn't normally see in a standard clinic, and to hone our skills. Over the five and a half days we were able to see 398 animals; 156 were surgical cases including spey and



Above: (from left to right) Tamara Thompson and Sarah Hailwood with puppies brought into the clinic



Above: (from left to right) Ruth Scheurich and Courtney Spencer intubating a patient

neuter surgeries and amputations, and 242 hospital cases including health checks, vaccinations, treating sick animals and attending to livestock.

Last year, SPAW ran a total of four volunteer clinics spread throughout the year in Tonga. Despite having several clinics

throughout the year, their services are still in high demand. Tonga does not have the luxury of having access to vet clinics every day like we do – if they require treatment for their pets or livestock, they must wait for one of the SPAW clinics. At the start of the year, Tonga was devastated by

Cyclone Gita. Tonga was hit particularly hard, and SPAW would appreciate help such as volunteer veterinarians and veterinary nurses, and both monetary and supply donations. If you can help in any way, please contact SPAW or visit their website: <http://spaw.org.nz>.



| Above: Outside the clinic



| Above: The amputee patient visiting the clinic the morning after the surgery



TIME TO START PLANNING HOW YOU'LL BE CELEBRATING



VET NURSE AWARENESS WEEK

IN YOUR CLINIC

Vet Nurse Awareness Week 8th – 12th October 2018