The veterinary profession is facing a number of challenges in the 21st century and the Faculty of Veterinary Science is taking a pro-active approach to preparing the next generation of veterinarians. Our new curriculum has been well received by the profession, with its focus on the problem solving, communication and management issues that confront veterinarians in day-to-day practice.

Our current Year 4 students will complete their formal studies in November 2003 and then enter a practical year of clinical training as “veterinary interns” in our veterinary teaching hospitals at Sydney and Camden. The Year 5 interns will undertake extramural rotations and electives in veterinary practices and with veterinarians in NSW Rural Lands Protection Boards – Associate Professor Rob Rutledge has been coordinating this program with practitioners around NSW. We are excited about this new phase of curriculum development as we seek to better meet community and professional needs for veterinary training, and for continuing professional learning after graduation.

Significant financial support from the Andrew Thyne Reid Charitable Trust has enabled the Faculty to invest in a major innovative teaching program, Learning Through Enquiry. This program will provide new approaches and skills for student-centred and life-long learning, both increasingly important as the profession changes and adapts to new challenges.

In looking forward to where the profession is going, it also is helpful to look back and see where we have come from. The stimulus for establishing veterinary schools in the 18th and 19th centuries was based on the need to provide better treatments for horses – veterinarians were then often called horse doctors. Only in the second half of the 20th century did veterinarians become critically important in animal agriculture. In Australia, the involvement of the profession in the eradication of brucellosis and tuberculosis was an extraordinary success but now we are facing challenges in providing effective services to rural communities and in attracting and retaining young veterinarians in the bush. The demand for veterinary services by pet owners and their preparedness to pay for veterinary services will no doubt drive much of the future development of the profession, one reason the Faculty is embarking on a major redevelopment of its Sydney Veterinary Teaching Hospital, to provide a world class facility for small animal clinical training.

The challenge for the community and for our profession is to equip veterinary graduates for wider opportunities in areas such as public health, research, ecosystem management and farm animal health and production. Increasingly we must focus on postgraduate training in these areas relevant to the community and our innovative on-line postgraduate program in Veterinary Public Health Management has had a great start with 18 students enrolled from around Australia and overseas. The Faculty is committed to looking for opportunities to partner with the profession in postgraduate training but in areas of public need, there does need to be an investment by governments and industry in creating attractive jobs that provide exciting career prospects, as well as good pay and conditions.

Increasingly our focus must be global and the Faculty has taken on the challenge of internationalisation. We hope the April 2003 visit by the American Veterinary Medical Association will lead to accreditation - this is the next step in a range of strategies developed to achieve our vision: a world leader in veterinary education, animal science and research, focused on the health and welfare of animals and benefit to the community. I continue to be grateful for the advice and support I receive from alumni, members of the profession and the general community as we strive to achieve this vision.

The Land

During March, the Land carried a 6-page special supplement on the Faculty and Foundation that reached a significant and important audience. The feature covered the Faculty’s commitment to the animal production industries and veterinary public health, research projects such as Oxine Johnstone’s Disease, and the specialist equine and large animal services of the University Veterinary Centre at Camden.

The Foundation is delighted to welcome Dogs Life Magazine, with a national readership and 400,000 registered pet magazine subscriber. The magazine will promote the Foundation and its activities. Think about subscribing - Dogs Life is a great read for the clients in your waiting room – see insert.
The Faculty of Veterinary Science came under intense scrutiny in mid-April during the preliminary Site Visit by three members of the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Council of Education and AVMA accreditation team – Chair Dr Doug Aspros, Dr Don Simmons (Director of the Council on Education), and Dr Richard Dierks.

The accrediting body for Veterinary Schools in the United States and Canada, the AVMA also offers accreditation for foreign schools – achieved by schools at the Universities of London, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Utrecht and Massey (New Zealand). Murdoch University (Western Australia) was waiting for the report from their final accreditation visit.

Accreditation is critical for our Faculty. Students graduating from an accredited school have their degree recognised in North America and are entitled to sit the US National Veterinary Licensing Examinations. It is both an important quality assurance process and a means of benchmarking different veterinary schools nationally and internationally.

Winning and maintaining AVMA Accreditation is a rigorous process and the Faculty AVMA Management Committee, led by Chair, Associate Professor Geraldine Hunt, has involved academic and general staff, and undergraduate and postgraduate students in the required processes.

The AVMA sets guidelines for 11 Standards covering a wide range of Faculty activities, with major emphasis on the effectiveness of teaching, scope of the curriculum, adequacy of facilities, occupational health and safety and outcomes assessment. The AVMA Standards can be viewed at the Faculty web site: http://www.vetsci.usyd.edu.au/. The accreditation process is:

• Submission of a comprehensive Self-Study Document outlining the Faculty’s strengths and weaknesses, and its performance in relation to the 11 Standards – February 2003
• Consultative Site Visit during which 3 members of the AVMA Council of Education tour the Faculty facilities, interview staff and students, and provide a report detailing the Faculty’s performance – 13 to 16 April 2003
• Preliminary report from the AVMA detailing areas of deficiency to be addressed
• Final Site Visit, usually in 1-2 years, after which the AVMA Council makes a final decision regarding the suitability of the Faculty for Accreditation.

Outcomes Assessment is a recent addition to the AVMA Standards and evaluates the Faculty’s assessment of the quality of its teaching program and its graduates. Very few veterinary schools have a formal mechanism for Outcomes Assessment and the Faculty will be conducting surveys and discussions with veterinary employers in 2003 to assess its success in meeting the objectives of its Strategic Plan, and to obtain feedback about undergraduate veterinary education.

FACULTY CALLS ON THE PROFESSION

More than 100 veterinary practices, Rural Lands Protection Boards (RLPB) and District Veterinarians have been visited by Faculty staff, including Professors Reuben Rose, David Hodgson and Graham Feletti and Associate Professor Bob Ratcliffe.

Their mission has been to brief veterinarians on the Faculty’s new curriculum, with particular focus on Years 4 and 5, and to seek advice about the implementation of the Extramural Studies component of the lecture-free final year.

Bob Ratcliffe, Associate Professor of Veterinary Clinical Practice, said, “The reception we’ve experienced has been warm and inspiring and the advice received invaluable. We will continue our schedule of visits through to July 2003, and then we plan to visit all practices and RLPG in the Extramural program each year”.

The Faculty is hosting a meeting for practitioners on the Sydney campus on 27 and 28 June. Keynote speakers are Dr Andrew Geldes of FMBC Business Development (who conducts Practice Management and Development workshops for vets and other professionals, and Dr Jim Martin of ValuVet. Professor Graham Feletti, the Faculty’s Education Consultant, will conduct workshops for Extramural supervisors and Faculty clinicians will present papers on case management subjects.

The positive response to the Faculty’s new on-line postgraduate program in Veterinary Public Health Management (VPHMgt) has endorsed its recognition of the need for training focused on diagnostic services of Australia’s vital animal production industries.

Eighteen Australian and international students participated in the February 2003 intensive 6-day residential unit that marked the beginning of the program. Students included private, industry, and government veterinarians, scientists and health professionals. Guest lecturer was Professor Edward Mather, Interim Director of the national Food Safety and Toxicology Centre at Michigan State University.

Participant Dr Penny Cain of AOPS said, “I am very glad to be enrolled in the VPHMgt course. It’s innovative and combines red meat with new practices.”

The program has been made possible by funding from Meat and Livestock Australia, the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation and the University of Sydney Innovation and Technology in Education Ventures Unit.

Website: www.vetsci.usyd.edu.au/publichealth_management/index.shtml

VETERINARY PUBLIC HEALTH MANAGEMENT

NEW ON-LINE DEGREE
Thirty dogs, patients of the University Veterinary Centre Sydney, have been part of a comprehensive 3 year clinical drug trial undertaken by Dr Jody Bradbrook, Lecturer in Small Animal Medicine, to investigate a new treatment for pituitary-dependent hyperadrenocorticism (PDH) or Cushings Disease, one of the most common endocrine disorders of adult dogs. Although the disease was first recognised in dogs over 60 years ago, its management can still be difficult, frustrating, and sometimes hazardous.

PDH causes high blood cortisol levels with a broad range of symptoms including polyphagia, polyuria, polydipsia, abdominal distension, skin and coat changes, hyperpigmentation, thinning, alopecia, calcium cutis, muscle wasting and weakness, lethargy and mental dullness. Most current treatment options have side effects and some are relatively ineffective.

Jody’s research has been the focus of a Masters in Veterinary Clinical Studies, and the challenging and sensitive task of maintaining commitment and treatment compliance by such a large number of clients and their pets over a long period has reaped genuine benefits – the drug, Trilostane, has proved to be extremely effective and safer, with less side effects, than other drugs currently used for the medical treatment of this disease.

Trilostane is a synthetic, hormonally inactive steroid that non-selectively inhibits steroid hormone production in adrenal, gonadal and placental tissues. It has been in human medicine to treat hyperadrenocorticism of various causes.

The clinical trial involved administering trilostane once daily for 3 months. The animals were monitored on days 10, 30, and 90 of treatment, and thereafter every 3 months, by clinical examination, tetraoscorin stimulation testing, UCCR (urinary corticoid/creatinine ratio) measurement and a client questionnaire on the dog’s general health, key symptoms and behavioural changes. The dog’s ages ranged from 5 to 14 (average 9.5 years), weights from 4 to 43 kg, and there were 5 entire and 6 castrated males, and 18 spayed and 2 entire females in the group.

Twenty-nine of the 30 dogs were successfully treated with trilostane – one responded favourably but died of unrelated disease before full control was achieved. The initial positive finding will now need to be confirmed with pharmacokinetic studies of trilostane absorption, metabolism and clearance in dogs to explore the variations in dose rates required for individual animals, and the duration of drug dosage required for each dog (larger dogs tend to require a lower dose than small dogs).

The study was made possible by the generous support of a British pharmaceutical company, Stegurn Pharmaceuticals LTD, which provided the drug at no cost. The participants were given the opportunity to purchase the drug at a reduced price.

In the last 12 months, the drug has started to be used commercially in the United Kingdom (not yet in Australia), but the University Veterinary Centre at Sydney is the only clinic in the Asia-Pacific region with any experience using the drug, and Jody has the impressive distinction of achieving the longest follow-up times on the efficacy of the drug of any researcher worldwide. She was one of the first to publish the findings of a large clinical trial with trilostane and has now presented her work at a number of international conferences.

The University Veterinary Centre at Sydney has considerable expertise in the research and treatment of endocrine disease. This successful trial has added to this core knowledge and will hopefully lead to a new and safe drug of choice for treating pituitary-dependent hyperadrenocorticism in dogs.

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**NAILING FELINE INFECTIOUS PERITONITIS**

Veterinary students Anne Quain and Erin Bell are undertaking their Bachelor of Science (Veterinary) projects on furthering the understanding of Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP) in Australia.

FIP is an inevitably fatal, immune-mediated disease of cats caused by virulent strains of feline coronavirus. First reported in Australia in 1974, there have been two peer-reviewed published studies of the disease since that time, and currently there is no acceptable diagnostic available to Australian practitioners. Since the treatment of choice for cats suffering from FIP is euthanasia, a presumptive diagnosis is not available to many owners.

Anne’s project will develop immunohistochemistry, already used overseas, to diagnose FIP in Australia. The technique will be used to confirm the disease in the 42 cases previously diagnosed by histopathology over 12 years at the University Veterinary Centre Sydney and Paddington Cattledog Hospital. Anne will also adapt the technique for immunocytochemistry with the aim of developing a minimally invasive, highly specific ante-mortem diagnostic test for FIP. “A diagnosis of FIP is like a death sentence for a cat,” said Anne. “We hope that immunocytochemistry will not only give practitioners a means of confirming a diagnosis of FIP, but also a means of ruling out FIP in cats showing similar signs. If we can save the lives of these cats, and find a definitive diagnosis, it will have all been worthwhile.”

Erin’s focus is on conducting a seroprevalence study within the Sydney region to determine frequency of exposure to coronavirus in different cat populations. She is comparing prevalence in pet cats, feral cats and cats raised in catteries to identify risk factors for infection and disease.

“This project will give vets an insight into patterns of coronavirus infection and epidemiology,” said Erin. “And I love both cats and research, so it’s a great way to combine the two!”

Anne and Erin’s projects are supervised by Dr Jacqui Norris, Lecturer in Veterinary Microbiology and a visiting associate in small animal medicine. Jacqui conducted the 12 year case retrospective study into FIP last year at the University Veterinary Centre Sydney.
Degenerative joint disease of the tarsometatarsal (TMT) and distal intertarsal (DIT) joints is the most common cause of hind limb lameness in performance horses, and while medical management often results in temporary improvement, around half of all horses treated conservatively remain lame.

A more radical approach to treatment - chemical arthrodesis using sodium monooiodoacetate (MIA) - has trialled at the University Veterinary Centre at Camden in a clinical study of 104 horses. MIA is known to cause cartilage degeneration through inhibition of glycosaminoglycans and cell death, and while the results of MIA injections have been previously described, comprehensive studies detailing technique and complications were not available.

The retrospective clinical study, undertaken by Associate Professor Andrew Dart, Hospital Director at Camden, and Senior Registrar Dr Brad Dowling, involved a wide range of horse breeds, including warmbloods, thoroughbreds and standardbreds, quarter horses, and Australian stockhorses. Aged 2 to 17 years, the horses’ activities included dressage, racing, endurance and jumping.

To qualify for the study, all horses underwent lameness and radiographic examination of the TMT and DIT joints and, in 61 horses, intra-articular anaeasthesia of the joints.

A total of 401 joints were injected with MIA and the intra-articular injections were performed under local conditions in the sedated, standing horse. Positive contrast arthrography was undertaken in all DIT joints to evaluate needle placement and the presence or absence of communication with other synovial structures. The mean intra-articular dose of MIA was 192 mg (range 50-400mg) – equivalent to a maximum of 2 ml of the drug.

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What prompted your move from agricultural science to veterinary science?

I always wanted to be a vet (designed my first vet practice in primary school), but I was offered a scholarship for Agricultural Science at Sydney University and started in 1998, completing 2 years of the 4 year degree.

I loved agricultural science – the degree program was rewarding, and the Faculty supportive. When I was offered a place in veterinary science it was very difficult. I had to question why I wanted to do the vet degree and vet Faculty members Dr Michelle Hyde and Professor Frank Nicholas helped me through that decision (both are agricultural scientists).

Has the decision to move to vet science been a good one?

Now I’m in fourth year vet science and I wouldn’t change a thing - the first two years in Ag ‘taught me an enormous amount, both academically and socially, but veterinary science is where I want to be.

What are you planning to do after graduation?

This changes depending on the prac work I’m doing – I tend to be motivated by enthusiastic people most. I would like to go into mixed practice, then work overseas, work with wildlife, undertake a PhD (not sure in what yet) and experience research, manage my own practice, and then perhaps back to academia to teach.

I’ve won a Fellowship, with 25 other international vet students, to join the Cornell University Leadership Program in June/July this year, in New York State. This involves a research project (mine is on Herpes virus latency) and leadership development. This will give me a feeling for research.

You’re the President of the student Veterinary Society - how do you manage this and study?

With difficulty! Study does sometimes take a back seat, but I feel that being involved in other activities is important, for both professional development, and social life. I was year 3 rep, and on the vets@work committee the past 2 years, and found this a great opportunity for students to interact with clients and the industry before graduation, when you get thrown in the deep end. I would rather regret something that I have done than something that I haven’t.

What do you do in your spare time?

I work as a part time vet nurse at Canley Heights and Austral Veterinary Clinics, putting into practice what I learn at uni, and do a lot of clinical vet work (for Wrex and AREV), which I love.

To relax, I’m a Waratahs fan (made, not born) and have tickets to a couple of World Cup games this year. I also love theatre – a favourite Christmas present was season tickets to Belvoir Street Theatre.

Who inspires you and why?

My Mum is my first source of inspiration – she is a very strong person, and managed to bring my sister and me up by herself. Her love and unconditional support have helped me to where I am – I have a lot to thank her for.

The J L Shute Building on the Faculty’s Camden campus has seen extraordinary developments in veterinary education and word first since its construction in 1969. Now it is undergoing a $2.1 million refurbishment to internal laboratories and office spaces, funded by the University of Sydney and the FH Loxton Bequest.

Professor Chris Maxwell, Chair of the Camden Management Committee, said, “The Shute Building’s many staff have risen to the challenges of temporary accommodation with minimal disruption to research and teaching. This is largely due to the efficient coordination and endless patience of Mr Craig Kristo, Senior Technical Officer on the Camden campus, who is responsible for overseeing the work with the University’s Facilities Management Office.”

The major renovations include bringing three laboratories up to the stringent standards required for the cutting edge research undertaken by the ever-expanding team of scientists at Camden. Other upgrades include:

- a cell culture complex designed to ensure high quality work flow practices
- two research centres with capacity for a large number of Ph.D., post-doctoral and other research students and staff
- an upgraded wet-lab teaching facility for practical demonstrations

The Faculty’s Canine Desexing Clinic, part of the undergraduate surgical program, will have its own purpose designed facility incorporating an animal holding room, a preparation area, and surgery. This will provide a dedicated teaching environment separate from the Camden University Veterinary Centre.

Craig Kristo said, “When they’re completed, the new facilities will play a crucial role in securing high level industry funding, and will significantly enhance both the student learning experience and the staff work environment.”

DERIVED FROM...
NEW INITIATIVE

Veterinary Clinical Trials Unit

The Faculty has identified the need to increase opportunities for research interaction with veterinary drug and equipment companies and biomedical researchers through its teaching hospitals at Sydney and Camden.

Australian veterinarian Dr Simon Pearce has returned from Canada to take on the role of Director of a new Veterinary Clinical Trials Unit. The unit will integrate areas of Faculty strength into clinical trials work with the aim of securing academic and financial outcomes. Simon has a strong background in clinical trials, having cofounded the Comparative Medicine and Experimental Surgery group at the University of Guelph in Canada in 2001.

A Melbourne graduate, he completed his PhD at Massey University in New Zealand, studying nutritional aspects of Developmental Orthopaedic Diseases of New Zealand Thoroughbreds, before commencing at the Ontario Veterinary College, University of Guelph. Here he held the positions of surgical resident, postdoctoral fellow, and Assistant Professor in large animal surgery. He is a Diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Surgeons.

Simon has already made contact with many veterinary pharmaceutical companies, and is working on a funding proposal to develop biomedical research in collaboration with research institutions in Sydney including the Universities of Sydney and NSW, the Heart Research Institute, the Centenary Institute, and the Institute of Bone and Joint Research.

Simon can be contacted by email: simonp@vet.usyd.edu.au or phone (02) 9351 5380.
FACULTY EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR PARASITOLOGY

Launched in 1971 as the official Journal of the Australian Society for Parasitology, the IJP is now the most highly cited journal publishing primary research papers in the field of parasitology.

Around 450 papers are submitted each year, with articles on significant diseases in domestic animals and humans, as well as papers on plant nematodes, parasites of wildlife and even of insects. Topics cover basic biology and ecology right through to molecular and immunological science, and parasites as diverse as microscopic protozoa, worms and arthropods.

Dr Sangster edits the IJP from an office in the McMaster building, with editorial assistant Ms Maria Meuleman. He has an editorial board of specialists from 13 countries.

He said, “This association with the IJP provides the Faculty with considerable exposure, and it also places the University at the centre of the distribution of knowledge in science - and that's one of the important roles of all Universities”.

HONOUR FOR DR ARTHUR WEBSTER

In December 2002, Dr Arthur Webster presented the Graduation Address in the University’s Great Hall and on the same day was conferred the title Honorary Fellow of the University of Sydney.

The Webster family has enjoyed a long and illustrious association with the national and international veterinary communities and Dr Webster, one of Australia’s most distinguished veterinarians, has supported veterinary science at the University of Sydney for 30 years. A Council member of the Post Graduate Foundation in Veterinary Science for more than 15 years (including a period as President), for the past 4 years he has also been a member of the Veterinary Science Foundation Executive Committee, playing a significant role in the Foundation’s strategies and fundraising.

Dr Webster is also chair of the Faculty Veterinary Clinics Advisory Board. To all these groups, he has provided critical expertise in business administration and strategic development, as well as a focus on continuing education and achieving key academic outcomes of teaching and research.

Graduating from the University of Queensland Faculty of Veterinary Science in 1968, Dr Webster studied at the School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in London, returning with a Diploma of Bacteriology (1970) to be the key player in commercial vaccine development in Arthur Webster Pty Ltd, the company founded by his father (his son is also a veterinarian). The company made major contributions to the health and productivity of Australia’s farm animal and poultry sectors and to the health of companion animals, including developing the world’s first parovirus vaccine. He is currently on the board of CSL, one of Australia’s major international companies.

Dr Webster has been an outstanding contributor to veterinary science, education and the broader community.

ALUMNUS WINS US AWARD

Dr David Dodd, a 1946 graduate of the Sydney University Faculty of Veterinary Science, has received the Olafsen Medal for his contribution to veterinary pathology. Dr Dodd, who has spent much of his professional life in the United States, received the prestigious medal from the American College of Veterinary Pathology in December 2002.

www.library.usyd.edu.au/VEIN/

VEIN (Veterinary Education and Information Network) is the leading information service for veterinarians and animal scientists in Australia. Pages attracting high hits include the VEIN Uni and Community homepage, Research Databases access page, and Links pages including Employment and Career, Horses, Animal Behaviour, Cats, Marine Mammals, Dogs and DUX. Two new Links pages are Surgery, and Teaching and Learning.

New members include a large number of recent graduates, and sites from VEIN Community will be attending the 2003 AWA conference to assist with enquiries and membership.

VEIN is a partnership between the Sydney University Library, Post Graduate Foundation in Veterinary Science, and the Veterinary Sciences Faculty and Foundation.

For further information, contact Su Hanfling, Coordinator Library Services (Life Sciences), on (02) 9351 5426 or email S.Hanfling@library.usyd.edu.au.

Merial launches new HEARTGARD® Combo

HEARTGARD® Chewables deliver 6 monthly doses

PARAGARD® delivers 2 doses administered quarterly

Six Months of Total Worm Control

Doses of Flea and Heartworm products dispensed by veterinarians continues to increase. However, the Allwormer market size remains relatively stable.

HEARTGARD® Combo is designed to assist veterinary practices achieve greater levels of intestinal worm treatment compliance.