



Malcolm Turnbull cuts the ribbon

Sydney's Animal Referral Hospital's (ARH) high field magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) machine, delivered late last year, has been launched by Malcolm Turnbull MP.

The machine has been dedicated to Turnbull's former pet, Mellie. Words about her, shared on his website after the dog's death last year now adorn the walls of the hospital.

"Mellie was a wonderful dog and we miss her very much," Turnbull said. "I'm sure she would

be very pleased [the MRI] is named after her. Congratulations to the ARH for the great work you do."

The machine is the first high field MRI in private veterinary practice in Australia specifically designed for companion animals and with technology equivalent to those in human hospitals. It will allow detailed diagnoses of conditions otherwise impossible to confirm without invasive surgery.

The machine will be available at all hours to ARH patients and by referral to other veterinary hospitals in the Sydney area.

"With an MRI, veterinarians can easily and accurately investigate dogs with hard-to-diagnose brain disorders, spinal cord dysfunction, nerve pathology, invasive cancers and obscure causes of lameness due to injured tendons, intervertebral discs, ligaments, bones and joints, among many other problems," ARH director David Simpson said.

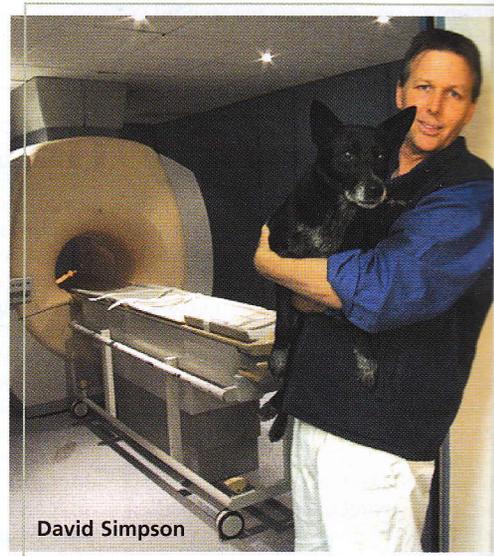
In the past, patients have not had immediate access to an MRI as specialist vets have relied on very limited access to human facilities, which is a problem for critically ill patients.

The introduction of the hospital's external referral service also means general practice veterinarians will be able to request an MRI and have the images and reports sent back to their practice for directing further diagnosis and treatment.

The ARH has access to specialist veterinary radiologists around the world, allowing efficient and timely reporting on all MRI images, whatever

time they are taken. MRI is also covered by pet insurance, making the service affordable to many pet owners.

"Thanks to the high field magnet MRI and other imaging modalities we have at the ARH (such as the CT scanner, digital x-rays, fluoroscopy, endoscopy and colour flow Doppler ultrasound), we can fully investigate veterinary cases as far as possible and to the level achieved in human medicine, and provide our patients with the best possible outcome," Simpson said.



David Simpson

Rough waters for AQIS as live export criticism continues

The Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) has conceded a live exporter acted inappropriately when a stockman was not present on board a voyage from Fremantle to Singapore.

However, a spokesperson for the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) said the report by the AQIS Accredited Veterinarian (AAV), Lloyd Reeve-Johnson, demonstrated that he was able, in conjunction with the crew of the vessel, to deliver the level of care that a stockman would have delivered as well as perform his other responsibilities.

Vets Against Live Export (VALE) has accused AQIS of coming to an illegal informal agreement with International Livestock Exports to remove Reeve-Johnson from the 2008 voyage.

The veterinarian was aboard the *MV Hereford Express*, which transported over 7000 sheep, cattle and goats from Fremantle to Singapore and Malaysia, was removed from the vessel in Singapore after reporting the mortality limit for goats had been exceeded.

When the vessel reached Singapore, Reeve-Johnson reported 18 dead goats, 5.14 per cent of consignment mortality level.

The vessel continued to Malaysia without an AQIS accredited veterinarian on board, which VALE claims contravened the Approved Export Program (AEP), a legal provision protecting animal welfare on live export ships.

International Livestock Exports was recently linked to exporting animals that were allegedly mistreated in three Indonesian abattoirs.

VALE claims the AEP required that the veterinarian remain on the vessel until all animals were unloaded.

Reeve-Johnson said he would like to see a greater transparency in the interactions between veterinarians, live exporters and AQIS.

"We have a situation where veterinarians are employed by live exporters, they are paid by live exporters, and if they displease them with their findings they are subsequently not rehired," he said.

"It is critical that veterinarians are independent on these voyages, obviously because they are the ones protecting animal welfare."

Sue Foster, VALE spokesperson, agreed that the on-board veterinarian and stockman are the key people responsible for animal welfare on live export ships.

VALE adds that Reeve-Johnson told them there was no stockman onboard, which they claim was a legal necessity.

"This incident shows that AQIS is prepared to be influenced by the exporter in a way that detracts from the intention of the law to protect animal welfare," she said.

"It is of great concern that AQIS allowed a voyage to occur without the legally required stockman and also agreed to the removal of the legally required on-board veterinarian."

"This raises serious questions about the ability and will of AQIS to properly regulate this industry."

VALE also claims there were two voyage reports with differing mortality rates. The exporter submitted the report with lower levels.

A spokesperson for DAFF said the department "takes its role of

regulator of live animal export operations seriously and maintains the highest level of integrity and compliance."

The spokesperson said an AAV was not required for the duration of the voyage, as prior to discharge in Singapore, the exporter sought and received approval from the department for the AAV to leave the vessel after the animals were discharged in Singapore and be replaced by an accredited stockman.

"The initial presence of an AAV on the voyage was necessary only to satisfy Singapore's import requirements."

"It is also clear that the arrangements for the AAV to be replaced by an accredited stockman for the remainder of the voyage to Malaysia was made in advance of the notifiable mortality incident."

VALE Policy Advisor Malcolm Caulfield, rejects this assertion.

"The veterinarian was bullied and ejected, and was categorically told by the exporter he should not report the issue," Caulfield said.

"It seems to be that a vet has kicked up a fuss halfway, they've contacted AQIS and said 'we need to get rid of this guy', and they've concurred. It is either total incompetence or an indication of something deeper."

In regard to the accuracy of the count, the spokesperson said that counts "must be as accurate as possible."

"Even in this case the AAV, with the aid of a crew member, was not able to give the precise number of goats on the vessel," the spokesperson said.

"Under the current sheep and goat system, there is the potential

for a small margin of error, as there is with any process involving a manual counting process."

The spokesperson added that the department's Compliance and Investigation branch has investigated serious issues raised by the AAV regarding "certain aspects" of the voyage.

"Under the Commonwealth's prosecutions policy, it can commence a prosecution only if there is a reasonable prospect of conviction. The Compliance and Investigation branch advice did not support this prospect, and the department took no further action," the spokesperson said.

In regard to goat mortalities, the AQIS investigation found that heat and humidity were contributing factors. The investigation also found there was insufficient information available to determine whether the animals were subject to any other disorder or diseases.

Since the voyage occurred, there has been an independent review of the live export system; the Farmer review.

A key recommendation of the review is for greater engagement by the department with AAVs and for them to provide their reports directly to the department.

Direct reporting has now been implemented and vets on livestock vessels are now reporting directly to the department rather than through the exporter.

The mortality investigation report and documents released under FOI relating to this voyage are available on the department's web site at daff.gov.au/

■ SAM WORRAD