



Veterinary Specialist Group

The Next Step

Issue 8, July 2007

EXPERTISE • TECHNOLOGY • COMPASSION

Staff Focus: - Sharon Lim

Sharon is part of the veterinary nursing team, working in the surgery department.

How long have you worked at VSG?

Four years, I think.

What do you enjoy about working at VSG?

The people who I work with just make my day, and the excitement.

What do you enjoy doing on the weekends?

Blobbering, and when I'm not blobbing I sing at church.

Tell me about your family.

I have my mum & my dad, and my younger sister. She is sometimes mistaken for as my twin sister even though we're 11 years apart.

Bonus for me !

What inspired you to become a veterinary nurse?

Cute round fuzzy things, especially the extra round ones.

How many animals do you have at home?

Three cats.

What is your favourite meal?

Everything, I love food!

And your favourite TV programme?

Hmm, Dancing With The Stars. He He !

What is your favourite holiday destination?

Don't really know. Somewhere sunny with lots of shopping andFOOD!

If you won Lotto tomorrow, what would you spend the money on?

I'd buy a big house, a big car, a big boat.....Hmm and probably retire and volunteer my services when there is a need for people who are generous with their time.



Sharon Lim

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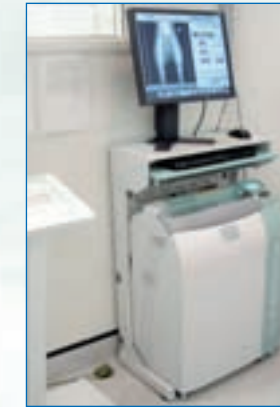
Website: www.vsg.co.nz

The Veterinary Specialist Group hospital is located on the Unitec campus situated between Gates 2 and 3 on Carrington Road.



Going Filmless - by Chris Warman

In March this year, the radiology department purchased a Fujifilm Capsula XL CR unit. The purchase of this computer radiology system, when combined with a web-based picture archiving and communication system (PACS), should allow the radiology department to become completely filmless by the end of the year. The Fujifilm Capsula XL CR system has also been chosen by Melbourne University for their radiology department and Sydney University is currently planning to install a Fujifilm CR system which will include a Capsula unit. A significant advantage of the Fujifilm Capsula XL CR unit is that it has allowed the radiology department to move into digital radiology without any modification of the current x-ray generating apparatus or table. The CR unit has a small footprint and has been easily positioned in the radiology room adjacent to the x-ray machine console.



The learning curve associated with going digital has been somewhat steep. All-in-all, the initial impressions of this exciting technology have only been favorable. We are currently recording a reduction of between 35-60% in the time taken to complete a study. The number of repeat exposures has significantly dropped. A considerable reduction in dose has also been achievable in many studies. Whilst spatial resolution is reduced compared with singular emulsion analog systems, the markedly improved soft tissue detail in images has more than counterbalanced this deficiency.



The Capsula XL unit will allow digitalized radiographic images, in addition to currently digitalized ultrasound images, to be

distributed throughout the hospital via the inhouse network and will also allow referring veterinarians and clients to access images through the Internet via a standard web-browser.

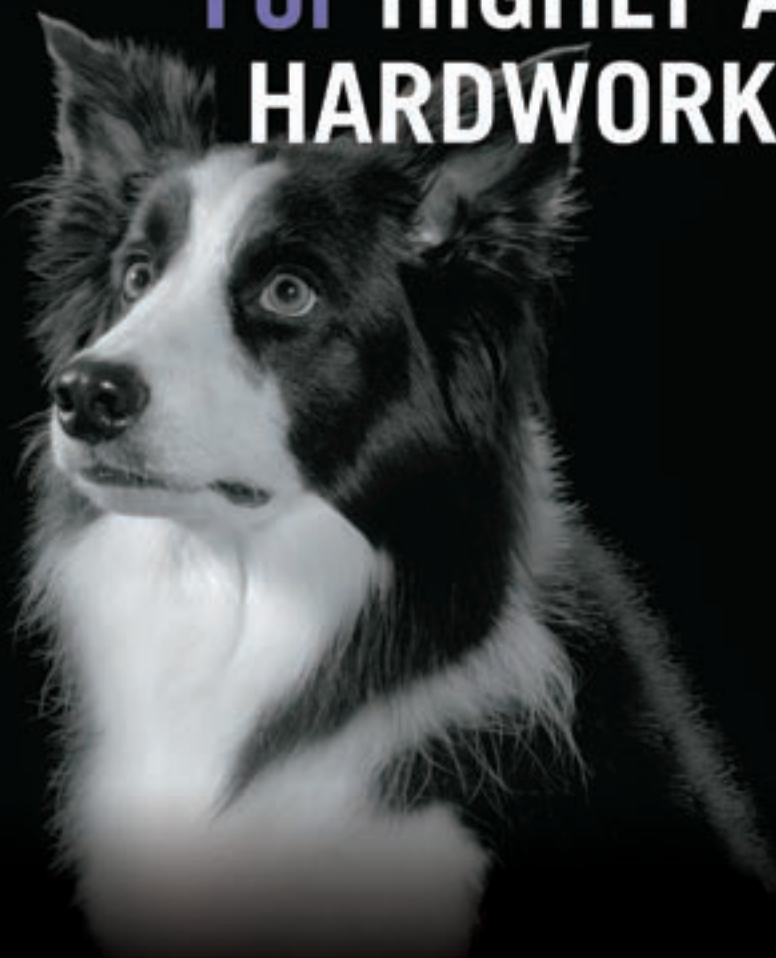
Images can then easily be sent to international experts for review and discussion where it's necessary.



The decision to opt for Fujifilm's Capsula XL unit, rather than another digital system, was largely due to Fujifilm's long experience in digital radiology, their extremely good local reputation amongst human radiology practices for service, and most importantly, the image quality we were able to achieve when testing the unit. In the few months since purchasing the unit, we have seen a further improvement in the image quality, with both modifications of our technique chart and the reading algorithms of the Capsula unit.



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Snapshots of Success



Samantha

Samantha presented in October 2003 for evaluation of a mineralized left-sided facial mass. A CT scan showed a tumour originating at the caudal mandible. There was no evidence of metastatic disease and surgical resection was recommended. A left caudal mandibulectomy was performed removing the caudal mandible, the temporomandibular joint, and the zygomatic arch. Samantha has been successfully treated with immunotherapy and a small regrowth of the tumour (osteosarcoma) was removed in April 2005. No further regrowth of the tumour has been detected.

Robert Palmer

When you take on a pet they become part of your family so you have to look after them. Sam is a great dog so when she got sick we looked at all the options and decided to do the best we could for her and that was taking her to VSG. After such serious surgery to remove her tumour we were amazed how she well recovered. The VSG staff were all excellent and we'd definitely recommend them to other pet owners.



Ben

Ben presented in January 2005 for treatment of a left ilial and acetabular fractures as well as an open comminuted fracture of

the right femur following road traffic trauma. The fractures were repaired using bone plating of the ilial and acetabular fractures and a plate/rod technique on the femoral fracture. His healing was uneventful and the femoral rod was removed 3 months following surgery. He has been seen several times since then and has made an excellent recovery despite chronic bilateral stifle osteoarthritis.

Yvonne & Pete

When Ben got run over we were devastated. Our local vets here in Tokoroa did everything they could for him but told us we needed to take him to the specialists. VSG were great - they not only saved his leg but saved his life and we are grateful that there are such skilled people around. They explained everything to us really well and were right on the button as far as their estimate of cost went which we really appreciated. Ben's back running around after the rabbits on our 8 acres and still goes everywhere with me. Thanks to VSG and our own vets who did such a good job with his legs in the first place.



Spencer

Spencer was a retired Guide Dog when he was presented to us in a near-dead recumbent state in early 2003. He was suffering from severe congestive heart failure. With a little luck Spencer survived the crisis and has become one of our most durable cardiac patients. He has enjoyed several "pimobendan birthdays" because we attribute a great deal of his survival to this excellent drug. He is now a vigorous 14-year-old.

Ronnie Bruell

Spencer had worked for me for many years as my Guide Dog - so we decided we would do what ever it took to ensure that he had a happy retirement. When he got sick we thought we were going to lose him. On arrival at VSG Mark instantly knew what was wrong with him and tried a new drug on him. At that point we thought he only had a few months to live - that was 4 1/2 years ago! It has

Snapshots of Success - continued

really been a great relationship between Spencer, us, VSG and our vet - everyone has always put Spencer first - he loves his regular visits and we are thrilled to have him still brightening up our lives.



Ellis

Ellis has just celebrated the one-year anniversary of her brush with death due to severe diabetic ketoacidosis. She was collapsed and probably septic at presentation and came through multiple severe metabolic abnormalities over an Easter weekend. With dedicated care from her owner Ellis is now having excellent quality of life. She underwent cataract surgery with aplomb and is a regular visitor to VSG for purely social reasons.

Michele Campbell

When Ellis got referred to VSG she was nearly dead but the care she got was amazing and I was allowed to come and go to be with her through her ordeal. They put on a night nurse so she had someone with her 24/7 and she finally pulled through. Her diabetes has been problematic since then and she was even blind for 5 weeks before she got new lenses. We still call in regularly and Ellis even went to VSG's Xmas party last year - she certainly got special treatment!



Tess

Tess has been treated with a modified Wisconsin protocol for lymphoma and is a fantastic pet to work with. Her owner has tried everything that we suggested. She is 18 months out from diagnosis and has been off chemo for nearly a year. We are too superstitious to claim a cure but this is an excellent remission and we hope it continues for a long time yet. Tess is a great example of what chemo can achieve.

Tara Kika

There is nothing I would not do for my 2 dogs (Tess & TJ). I was given the approximate costs and though it wasn't cheap as long there was a good chance of a positive outcome I had no hesitation in going ahead with the chemo. I also knew that Tess was in the best hands at VSG because TJ had been treated for cancer at VSG too. The staff at VSG are just the best!!! From the lovely ladies at reception desk, the nursing staff and the vets - I found every one to be professional and friendly. I even think Tess enjoyed her visits as her tail always wagged when the nurses took her away for her treatments.



Java

Java was seen for a hindlimb/lumbar pain that had been present for almost 2 years. Orthopaedic and neurological examination indicated a lumbosacral problem. CT study showed a large osseous fragment dorsal to the L7-S1 intervertebral disc space sitting within the spinal canal. A dorsal decompression, fragment removal (very large) and stabilisation with screws was performed. The lesion was thought to be due to an OCD-like lesion of the sacrum that has been recorded in German Shepherds. Java recovered well, but still had exercise intolerance. Hypothyroidism was diagnosed 3 months later and she has improved markedly with thyroid hormone supplementation.

Graeme Ridler

When Java lost mobility and enjoyment for the things she loved doing we were very concerned. We did not want her suffering and wanted the best treatment and the best quality of life we could give her - VSG allowed us to do that and we're delighted to have her back in top form.

The team at VSG were fantastic!! Alex the vet WOW he was superb. He always took a lot of time to explain in detail the problem and the procedure and every time he was 100% right.



Bosco

Bosco was diagnosed, at 2 years of age, with cervical spondylomyelopathy caused by vertebral deformity. Myelography showed dorsal and lateral compression at spaces C4-5, 5-6 and 6-7. The only treatment possible for these dogs is extensive dorsal decompression and stabilisation with screws placed across the dorsal facets. We know that many of these patients will be worse post-operatively but then gradually improve to regain locomotion. Bosco's surgery was a marathon 6 hours and was one of the most extensive dorsal decompressions done at VSG. Bosco was non-ambulatory post-op but with good nursing and excellent care and dedication from his owners, he has regained good motor function and has been able to live an active life.

Andrea Jarocki

Bosco is a really loving dog and has a huge personality to go with his size and I had to give him the best possible chance since he was so young.

I was told by our vet that Bosco needed surgery and VSG offered the best option - the best of the best I'd say. Everyone at VSG was so great, they were all very professional and they took the best care of Bosco during his hospitalisation.

Bosco is almost back to normal, he chases his little 'brother' Rick

the Jack Russell around the back yard, plays soccer with his favourite soccer ball and leaps up 4 steps from the lawn to the deck in a single bound. He's very happy in himself, so I'm thrilled.



Blackie

Blackie Witt presented to the medicine department at Veterinary Specialist Group in September 2004. His referring veterinarian had made a biopsy diagnosis of lymphoblastic lymphoma of the colon. The colonic lymphoma was still present and able to be palpated. Blackie was given a COP (cyclophosphamide, Oncovin, a trade name of vincristine and prednisone) protocol. Blackie quickly went into remission and gained weight. We generally stop the chemotherapy protocol at 12 months, however Blackie continued to have a 'maintenance' dose every two months until September 2006. Typically the response rate and duration of remission with high grade gastrointestinal lymphoma is lower than other anatomic locations in cats. In studies overseas around 30% of cats that go into remission are long term survivors. Blackie has done very well!

Leonie Witt

Blackie was a refugee cat that I adopted in June 2001 and he has always been very attached to me. When he got ill and we ended up at VSG I decided if there was something I could do for him then I would do it. It was a really big decision whether to go ahead with chemotherapy and I am really grateful that I could afford to do it. Knowing all the facts made the decision easier and since all the tests had been done I knew that the cancer was his only battle to win so we went ahead with treatment. I never once considered that the treatment wouldn't work for him and he tolerated it really well - apart from losing his whiskers! Now he's back to his normal weight and apart from being more fussy about his food he is doing great. The VSG and my own vets have all been fantastic - you would think that he was their own cat - they really care about him.

Radiographic Assessment of Cardiac Size - by Chris Warman

Thoracic radiology has historically been utilized to evaluate patients for cardiac disease. Altered size and shape of the cardiac silhouette may provide some clinical insight as to the primary pathological process that is affecting the heart. Thoracic radiology has also been utilized to assess patients for secondary features of heart disease, such as pulmonary edema and pleural effusion. The interobserver agreement on radiographic features of secondary heart failure has historically proven to be higher than interobserver agreement concerning cardiac size and shape.

Significant subjectivity, in relation to size and shape, is required when assessing the image of the cardiac silhouette. Unfortunately the skill of "subjective assessment" has proven to be extremely difficult to teach. Many clinicians and students find it difficult to appreciate some of the critical features in a radiograph which an experienced clinician uses to confirm cardiomegaly. Fortunately for us all, in the mid 1990s, Buchanan and others identified a consistent relationship between the vertebral body length of the thoracic spine and the size of the cardiac silhouette. The Vertebral Heart System, as the authors named it, has proven to be a godsend for clinicians in practice. The Vertebral Heart System has proven to be extremely easy to teach and the results are readily repeatable.

The Vertebral Heart System, which can be applied equally as well to thoracic radiographs of both adult dogs and puppies, was subsequently developed so that it could be applied to evaluate cardiomegaly in feline patients. The use of this tool has in recent years become wide spread. However, like all tools, it has limitations and can be used inappropriately.

Important points to remember when using the Vertebral Heart System:-



Figure 1 Left Lateral

The heart score should be calculated on a radiograph taken at peak inspiration in the right lateral recumbency. Radiographs performed at expiration will frequently reveal an increased craniocaudal cardiac dimension when compared with those taken

at peak inspiration. A significant discrepancy in size and shape of the cardiac silhouette is recorded between the left and right recumbent lateral radiographs.

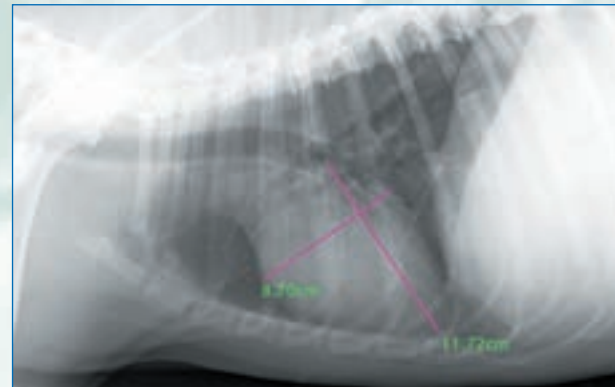


Figure 2 Right Lateral

Breed specific differences in the Vertebral Heart System have been recognized since Buchanan et al published their initial work. Boxers, Labradors, Whippets and King Charles Spaniels have all been documented to have a Vertebral Heart System score significantly higher than the initial published normal reference range of 9.7 +/- 0.5.

Racing whippets have a significantly higher score than non-training dogs or show dogs.

The Vertebral Heart System's strength lies in detecting cardiac disorders that result in dilatation of cardiac chambers. Cardiac disease entities that result in concentric hypertrophy of cardiac chambers can be significantly underestimated.

An abnormal vertebral heart score indicates a 95% probability that the measurement is indicative of abnormal heart size across the breed ranges. The correlation between an abnormal score and cardiomegaly is higher in breeds such as the Yorkshire Terrier and King Charles Spaniel, but significantly lower in the Boxer.

Mild to moderate atrial enlargement may not be detected if the clinician places total reliance on the vertebral heart scale to assess a patient for cardiac enlargement. The sum score of the vertebral heart scale is more dependent upon ventricular enlargement than atrial enlargement.

Subjective assessment of the cardiac silhouette is required to identify specific chamber and vessel enlargement. Only with time and practice does a clinician become confident in their own ability to appreciate specific cardiac pathology on thoracic radiographs. With the confidence of knowing that cardiomegaly does exist, with the help of the Vertebral Heart System, the clinician or student is more likely to have confidence in their own subjective evaluation of the cardiac silhouette and the recognition of specific chamber enlargement.

VSG Referral Guide

The new VSG Referral Guide will be arriving in clinics around Auckland in July.

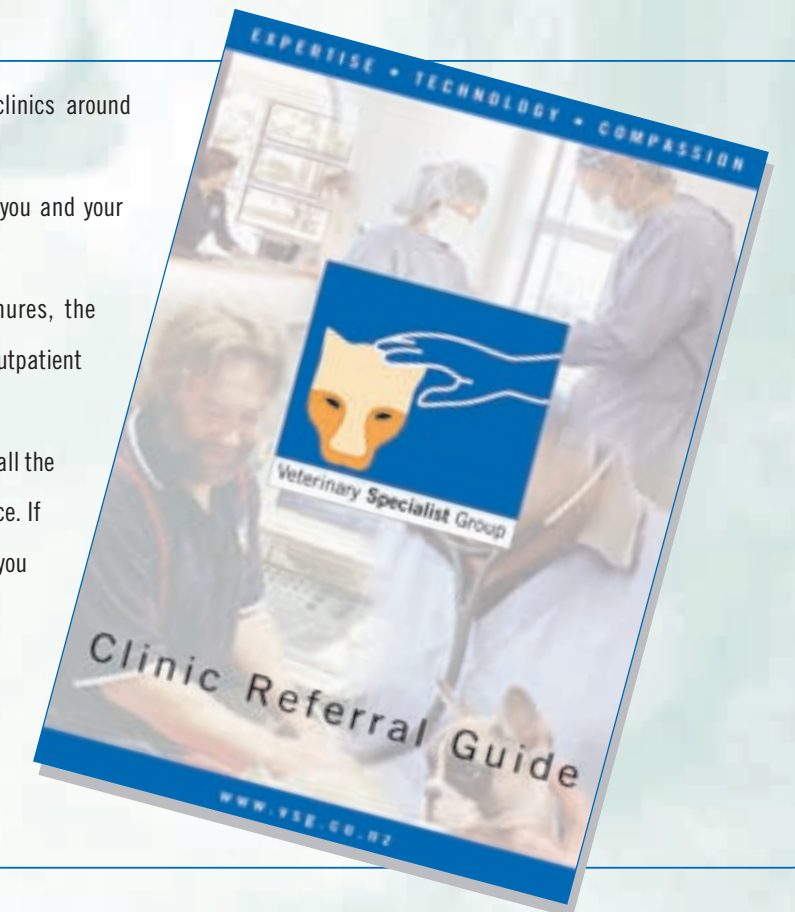
The guide provides detailed information to assist you and your clients through the referral process.

Included in the guide are; referral forms, brochures, the referral process, current pricelist, information on outpatient referrals, etc.

I'm sure you'll find it useful and convenient to have all the relevant information for referral together in one place. If you have any suggestions on items that will assist you please contact me here at the hospital.

If you have not received the VSG Referral Guide in your clinic by the end of July, please email us at; info@vsg.co.nz to request one.

Sharyn van Aalst



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