

Visiting specialist surgeon service in Sydney and region

Sometimes there are situations where clients prefer to have their pet remain in their regular vet practice but still receive specialist care. Eugene Buffa, founder of Consulting Animal Specialists, recognised this need and has since set up a visiting surgical specialist service within general practice.

Founded in October 2011, Eugene is currently the only registered specialist small animal surgeon operating a mobile service in Sydney.

Eugene has previously worked as a specialist surgeon at Sydney University, where he was head of Small Animal Clinical Services at Camden, as well as the Small Animal Specialist Hospital (SASH) for three years.

"I realised there was a need for such a service while working at the specialist centre. The facilities required at specialist centres can make elective procedures unaffordable to some clients. I felt that I could provide a more affordable alternative by providing specialist services within general practice facilities," he said.

Eugene's new specialist consulting service is not the first time he has worked in general practice. Before qualifying as a specialist surgeon in 1995, Eugene worked in general practice for five years in both England and South Africa. He also started a general practice 22 years ago and built it up into a six vet specialist centre in Johannesburg.

"My background has given me a good understanding of the day to day running of a general practice which enables me to form a good relationship with the vets and their supporting staff."

"It has not been difficult to adapt to practice in Australia, as the attitudes of the clients and the working environment are pretty similar. The standard of veterinary practice [in Australia] is very high because of the close animal-human bond. Owners are generally very responsible and will follow their veterinarian's advice."

Vet practices do not need to provide extra surgical equipment to facilitate Eugene's specialist services as he brings all his own equipment in, including sterile packs, suture materials and even an electrocautery and suction unit.

"I bring all instrumentation and materials required for the surgical procedures," Buffa said. "This includes basic and specialist surgical kits, electrocautery, suction, implants, drapes and suture materials. All I require from the veterinarian is a veterinary supervised anaesthesia, pre and post-operative radiographs, bandage material, laboratory tests and medications."

The equipment used during the surgery is taken back to the Consulting Animal Specialists facility, where it is cleaned, repacked and sterilised, ready for the next procedure.

Common surgical procedures performed on a mobile basis include cranial cruciate ligament repair via TPLO or TTA, patella luxation repair, bone fracture repair, total ear canal ablation, salivary mucocoele, oncological resections and reconstructive surgeries, to name a few.

It is important that in order for the high standard to be maintained that vet practices have a clean operating room and a good quality surgical table as well as good general anaesthetic protocols and after-care.

There are some surgeries that are best performed at one of the specialist referral centres and Eugene will advise of this where appropriate. For example, those that require 24-hour post-operative

veterinary monitoring or specialist anaesthesia, such as chest trauma.

"The surgical cases that lend themselves to my service would be animals with surgical conditions that are otherwise in good general health where specialist surgical equipment and training would be required to perform the ideal treatment."

There are also general practices that already have a good quality surgeon working with them that can perform more difficult surgeries, but there is sometimes a gap when that surgeon goes on leave. Now clients have the option to ensure their pet has the surgery carried out in a familiar environment, without delay.

"I enjoy the close contact between the general practitioner and the specialist that this business affords me. It leads to a better understanding of each other's needs and it provides a basis for a good long-term relationship."

My aim is to provide an extension of the general practice to enhance the service they can provide to their client."

Consulting Animal Specialists consult from Monday to Friday 8am until 6pm in Sydney and visit Bathurst, Orange and the Central Coast every four to six weeks.

Visit www.animalspecialists.com.au for further information.

■ **GRETTA HOWARD**

