

# Veterinary nursing students help out in Tonga

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For one week during December last year, a team from Unitec's Diploma in Veterinary Nursing Programme participated in a veterinary clinic as part of the volunteer programme run by South Pacific Animal Welfare (SPAW) on the island of Tongatapu, in the Kingdom of Tonga.

**S**PAW is a New Zealand-based charity that organises free clinics and animal welfare education in several Pacific Island communities that would otherwise have limited or no access to regular veterinary care. The clinics are staffed by volunteer veterinarians and veterinary nurses.

The Unitec group comprised members of the veterinary nursing teaching team, 10 Unitec veterinary nursing students and veterinarians Dr Geoff Neal (Blockhouse Bay Vet Centre) and Dr Kim Telford (Unitec Veterinary Hospital). We were also fortunate to have the assistance of Nau Fosta, a local currently undertaking a veterinary technician degree at Massey University, who was back in Tonga for the summer break.

As well as providing much-needed veterinary assistance, the trip also gave the students a unique opportunity to utilise their veterinary nursing skills in a rewarding way, experiencing another side of veterinary care and the role it plays in the health and welfare of the animals on one of our neighbouring Pacific Islands.

From day one, it was obvious that the week would be no Pacific Island holiday! At the SPAW base, and during visits to local villages, we collectively saw 277 animals, of which 117 had surgery. Most were dog desexing operations; other procedures performed included tail and limb amputations and a thyroidectomy. As well as surgical and medical treatments, vaccinations and parasite control were a major focus and the occasional pig, goat and horse consult completed the mix.

Despite the busy days and the challenges of working in a foreign country without most of the normal "luxuries" we are accustomed to in a clinic (no anaesthetic machines or beeping equipment in sight!), it was a fantastic week for all involved. It was immensely satisfying to provide a high level of care to so many animals (and to the relief of their human carers) and to also watch the confidence and skills of the students grow in the process. And, yes, we did occasionally get to

a beach. The experience was so worthwhile that another Unitec trip with SPAW is already being planned for 2014.

Thanks must go to the companies and individuals who supported the trip through either donated or subsidised materials, especially principal sponsor **Zoetis**, Robbie Williams (**Ethical Agents**), Wendy Rosenburg (**Bayer**) and our colleagues in Unitec's Department of Natural Sciences. ■

 [www.spaw.org.nz](http://www.spaw.org.nz) or [volunteer@spaw.org.nz](mailto:volunteer@spaw.org.nz)

## NZVA News

### Call for nominations:

## NZVA Companion Animal Society (CAS)


**N**ominations are called from CAS members interested in serving on the branch committee. All CAS members are eligible and welcome to apply.

We promote the value and importance of companion animals in society and aim to improve the knowledge, expertise and personal development of veterinarians involved in companion animal practice.

The term of office for committee members is a minimum of two years and a maximum of three years. Under CAS branch rules, three committee members will retire by rotation each year. Two of these members have indicated that they are available for re-election.

Under the terms of the NZVA branch rules, signed nomination forms from a proposer and seconder and containing a declaration from the nominee that they are prepared to stand for election must be lodged with the branch secretary no less than 60 days before the annual general meeting (AGM).

The AGM will be held 5pm at the Claudelands Events Centre, Hamilton, on Thursday 19 June 2014 during the NZVA conference. Nominations must be lodged with the branch secretary no later than Sunday 20 April 2014. ■

 For nomination forms or further information about becoming a committee member, please contact the branch secretary Rochelle Ferguson: [cas@vets.org.nz](mailto:cas@vets.org.nz)

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