

## **THE HISTORY OF VETERINARY SPECIALISATION IN THE GREYHOUND INDUSTRY**

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### **The Pioneers**

In the 1940s, greyhound tracks in Victoria were basically privately owned. The Control Board was a separate authority. The operating tracks were Sandown Park, Maribyrong, White City and Napier Park. At this time there was not a veterinary surgeon employed by any club. Hector Kendall of the Kendall family (involved in establishing the original veterinary school in Melbourne), who was in retirement from veterinary practice was employed part-time as greyhound steward at the Napier Park track at Essendon. In 1947 Neville Sanders who had returned from the war set up practice at Ivanhoe and in late 1947 he approached two secretaries, one being Jack McKenna at Sandown Park with the idea of employing a veterinary surgeon during race meetings and as a result Neville spent many years in that veterinary role until the government closed down private greyhound tracks. Greyhound racing eventually recommenced at North Melbourne and Sandown Park. Fred Wiltshire took over from Neville and worked at North Melbourne. The club eventually closed and restarted at Olympic Park on the banks of the Yarra River. Fred was sadly killed in an accident and Neville resumed the veterinary surgeon's job at Olympic Park until his retirement 25 years later.

In 1952 Jim Gannon graduated from the University of Queensland and after a short stint at Monto moved to Melbourne where he set up practice at 300 High Street, Kew. Initially interested in equine practice it turned out that he was allergic to horses and following a life threatening operation he turned his attention to a companion animal and greyhound practice. He soon became in great demand from the greyhound trainers who had a habit of attending the surgery after the race meetings at Olympic and Sandown Park which meant that he was still consulting at 2.00am. His passion and commitment to greyhound medicine and surgery developed over the years to the point where he became a keynote speaker at conferences in the UK and America and in 1994 co-authored "The care of the Racing Greyhound" with American authors Linda Blythe and Morrie Craig. The book has now been updated to include the retired greyhound. Dr Des Fegan became a co author of the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

In Sydney the two main tracks were Harold and Wentworth Parks ( Harold Park has been closed for some years now). Veterinarians practicing at that time included Ron Bowen, Reg Hoskins and Phil Davis. Reg had an extensive practice and would often meet and vaccinate at the airport a litter of pups that had been flown in from rural NSW. He was the official track veterinarian at Harold Park for many years prior to his retirement to the NSW coast at Foster. Phil Davis lectured at Sydney University and contributed many articles on the greyhound to the AVJ.

His work on heart scores showed that there was not the strong correlation with performance that was exhibited with thoroughbreds. Many colleagues felt that his work was of Ph.D standard but there was no-one in a position to examine him. Like so many other practitioners then and now, reared and trained his own greyhounds which gave him firsthand knowledge of performance and physiology.

### **The Post Graduate Courses**

The Post Graduate Foundation was the brainchild of Tom Hungerford OBE. BVSc.FACVSc.HDA who remained the driving force for many years until ably succeeded by Doug Bryden. Concerned that information on greyhound medicine and surgery was fragmented and not documented a refresher course was organised for September 1989. This was a first for Australasia and arguably the world. Doug Bryden wrote in the preface "Following Dr. Hungerford's retirement the Post Graduate committee determined that in his honour one of its refresher courses would be named for him. It is a great honour indeed for us to have the course named "The TC Hungerford Refresher Course on Greyhounds" The publication of the proceedings became a "bible" for many trainers and owners and because there are no reprints it is jealously guarded by those who still have a copy.

### **Werribee**

In the early 70s, Jim Gannon approached the University with the idea of setting up a process whereby greyhound trainers could have their animals screened for general and physical health. The screening included radiology and bacteriology together with blood profiling. Professor Doug Blood supported the idea. The program was not an excessive financial impost and many trainers took advantage of the service. Unfortunately like so many good initiatives it died out after a year for reasons unknown.

Nowadays a course of lectures on medicine and surgery is presented by Drs. Ray Ferguson and Chris Boemo each year including a valuable book of notes which is available to the profession as a whole.

### **Artificial insemination and frozen semen**

Under the national rules a stud dog can serve a maximum of 14 bitches a month and artificial insemination was frowned upon even though Neville Sanders had been experimenting with chilled semen and extenders in the 1950s. At an Australian Greyhound Racing Association conference in Auckland in 1979 (?) a motion allowing the use of artificial insemination was introduced and passed. One argument in favour of the motion was the successful inseminations from an imported Irish sire Newmore King who had his right hind leg amputated following bone cancer and obviously could not serve a bitch naturally.

In the early 70s, Jim Gannon was in America and with eminent trainer Pat Dalton visited Richard Conole at College Station, Texas. Conole had developed a successful method of freezing canine semen which is inherently fragile and Gannon was able to import frozen semen from America after which an experiment was set up to inseminate 12 bitches here in Australia. The success rate had to be as good as or better than that from natural services which was of the order of 75%. Of the 12 inseminated, ten bitches became pregnant and so frozen semen became accepted as a tool in veterinary practice. Today frozen semen is sent both interstate and overseas and in fact is considered the norm. Conole was considered in such high esteem that many veterinarians spent time at Camelot Farms attending the course provided.

The most common procedure is by surgical implantation although John Newell at Newcastle had developed the technique of transcervical insemination that does away with surgical interference.

### **Macau. Vietnam and China**

The former postage stamp Portugese colony of Macau has been a centre of greyhound racing for many years. The dogs are confined to the Canidrome where they are housed and exercised daily on the racetrack itself. Though the kennels are basic, the dogs are well fed and race two to three times a week. The present resident veterinarian is Dr Tiger Wu. The surgery is sparse but functional.

Some years ago Dr. Jim Gannon was asked to advise on parasite and disease control at the complex and he has visited Macau on a number of occasions over the years. Even in retirement he is formulating and updating swabbing procedures.

In November 1999, a greyhound track and complex was built in Vung Tau, Vietnam under the direction of Bevan Williamson from Brisbane and the complex is managed by another Australian Phil Bell. What was originally a track has now expanded to a facility which houses some 500 greyhounds. The majority of the original dogs were imported from Australia but now under the tutelage of Dr John Newell (Newcastle) the complex is virtually self-sufficient. Dr Newell has initiated a number of programs which include the micro chipping of all dogs and the breeding of animals within the complex. Some four years ago, a nutritional problem arose and Drs Newell and Ray Ferguson spent some time in Vung Tau bringing the problem to a satisfactory conclusion. At the moment new tracks are being planned for Saigon and Hanoi, again with the advice of John Newell.

John is also advising the Chinese on the development of the industry. There are some 300 tracks in China. At the moment greyhounds are imported from Australia where they are well housed and each dog is known by its Chinese and English name. Match racing between two dogs is the norm.

### **The AGVA**

The Australian Greyhound Veterinary Association was formed in 1984 by a group of enthusiastic veterinarians who were interested in animal sports medicine, physiology and surgery. Many such as Dr. Phil Davies trained their own greyhounds and had the benefit of hands-on experience with the breed. Although numerically a small SIG the members have brought their skills and expertise to the industry and are now considered valued advisors to the State jurisdictions and Gannon, Graeme Beh and Dion Danalis have been members of State racing authorities. Only recently the NSW board have seconded a group of four to act as advisers. These include Ted Humphries, Peter Yore, Robert Zammit and Bob May. Dr Geoff Baxter is a member of the Tasmanian Greyhound Racing Board and Dr John Katakasi a member of the South Australian Board.

The association meets annually either in conjunction with the annual AVA conference or separately and now includes some 150 members from Australia and New Zealand. The subject matter at the conferences has centered on the variety of track injuries and their repair , both soft tissue and orthopaedic, and the treatment and prevention of race and post-race physiology.

Two initiatives have arisen from this, one being a recommendation that race meetings be abandoned should the ambient temperature be above 42°C ( often the track surface, can be 50°C ) and the second being the establishment of an official track protocol which provides an essential guideline to attending veterinarians. At present there is a rise in the number of animals suffering from "thumps" and post-race hypoxia and good work has been carried out by Chris Doyle in South Australia and Peter Thomas in Western Australia ( sadly Peter passed away when his research was coming to fruition). At the Sandown clinic, Alastair Smith has worked with the clinic's hyperbaric chamber to investigate the recovery rate of soft tissue injuries (there has been a noticeable improvement in recovery rates). The Current President of AGVA is Dr Chris Doyle who is the OTV at Angle Park in Adelaide. Chris has been a great leader for the group and has an intimate working knowledge of the industry.

### **The Sandown Clinic**

Alex Hauler was followed by Dr Philip Carpenter. Phil left the clinic to continue dairy and greyhound practice at Warrnambool. Dr Chris Boemo ran the clinic for many years until Chris set up his own clinic.

In the early 1970s, Alex Hauler established the Sandown veterinary clinic within the confines of the Sandown greyhound track with the support of the club's committee. Alex was intrigued by the recurring nature of track injuries and investigated this and as a result of this developed chiropractic techniques. His untimely death in 2007 left a void in this field. The surgery was in danger of closing when Alex left and at the pleas from the club committee Jim Gannon set about revitalising the clinic where it gained the reputation for being a centre of excellence with the introduction of a number of initiatives including cadetships in 1996 with the requirement that successful candidates work in a greyhound clinic for at least one year. This was specialised training for vets to continue to provide services dedicated to the health and welfare of racing greyhounds.

Under the tutelage of Alex and Jim, a large number of greyhound specialist veterinarians were produced. These included Dr Janine Kirshner, Dr. Peter Yore, Dr Philip Carpenter, Dr Michael Bell and Dr Chris Boemo. Currently Dr Alastair Smith has been in charge of the clinic which has expanded to include quarantine facilities for greyhounds visiting from the UK and USA. One recent initiative mentioned previously is the installation of a hyperbaric chamber which has shortened injury recovery time.

### **The Greyhound Adoption Programme**

This program was informally inaugurated at the Sandown clinic in 1996 and received support from the controlling body and the RSPCA. Ultimately the concept and title was adopted by all the Australian and New Zealand controlling authorities. Neither of the other two racing codes have been able to achieve this animal welfare service for their industries. This initiative has been welcomed throughout Australia and, thanks to the dedication of carers, many more and more greyhounds enjoy a comfortable retirement after their racing days are over. The dogs are de-sexed at a markedly reduced cost by equally dedicated veterinarians and wear a distinctive green collar and in the majority of cases do not have to be muzzled in public. It is certainly a feather in the cap of all concerned.

### **The Official Track Veterinarian Protocol**

First postulated in 1995, this has since been fine-tuned by a panel headed by Dr Ray Ferguson. The booklet produced and made available to all jurisdictions and track veterinarians proposes to:

- Maintain uniformity of pre-race and post-race procedures
- Establish a good degree of uniformity of Standown Periods for injuries sustained during racing.
- Ensure familiarity with swabbing requirements and protocols
- Foster a good working relationship with Board Stewards.

This valuable booklet is available from Dr Ray Ferguson at the Monash Veterinary Clinic

1662 Dandenong Rd. Clayton Victoria 3168

### **Publications and Videos**

Publications and videos produced over the past years include:

Greyhound Acupuncture ..... Dr David Gilchrist

Care of the Racing and Retired Greyhound ..... Drs Gannon, Blythe, Craig, and Fegan

Instructional videos produced by Drs Peter Yore and John Newell

Examination of the racing greyhound for soundness. Dr Jim Gannon

The Racing Greyhound ...Roy Burnell

The annual proceedings of the AGVA

### **A Reflection.**

Arguably the most important criterion that sets the Australian and New Zealand greyhound veterinarian apart is the experience gained by rearing and training their own hounds. This gives them an intimate knowledge of the problems and conditions faced from birth to retirement both physiological and anatomically. Graham Beh in Queensland took time off from practice to train and race successfully at the Gabba track during the seventies and eighties as did Phil Davis. In South Australia, John Katakasi has raced for a number of years as has Tom Astbury in NSW. This has provided a wealth of first hand experience in all aspects of medicine and surgery. The industry is fortunate to have the likes of orthopaedic specialists Dr Chris Boemo and Dr Richard Eaton-Wells who keep practitioners informed of recent surgical developments. The AGVA continues to be an active and enthusiastic chapter of the AVA especially due to the efforts of the secretary Dr Ray Ferguson who is the glue that has kept the organisation together. A Meritorious Service Award (MSA) is small recognition of his dedicated service over many years. Other AGVA -veterinarians to receive AVA MSA are Dr Chris Boemo and Dr Harry Cooper.