Will Humphreys BVA Travel Grant Experience Summary

Investigating the prevalence of Canine Heartworm (*Dirofilaria immitis*) and 3 other Vector Borne Diseases on Viti Levu, Fiji

I was delighted to hear that my application to the BVA Travel Grant had been accepted. Although the grant extended my commute to placement by some 24 hours, the opportunity to carry out a short research project abroad enabled me to really get stuck into some medicine not routinely seen in the UK and to experience the perks and the failures of third world Veterinary Science, and continuously adapt to these and apply them to my work. Naturally, it would be wrong to travel to a country such as Fiji, without exploring its further reaches and experiencing the rich culture, and the opportunity to travel presenting itself naturally alongside a successful application to the BVA Travel Grant scheme was a huge attraction for me.

Fiji forms an archipelago of 333 islands located in the South Pacific, ENE of the East Coast of Australia. It is reknowned for diving, beautiful beaches and a rich cultural heritage. The West Charity Trust Society now operating and hereafter referred to as Animals Fiji, was founded in 2011 to support the Nadi branch of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Fiji (the SPCA) operating out of Fijis capital Suva. In July 2012, the SPCA could no longer support their Nadi branch and Animals Fiji began to operate self sufficiently, providing the only veterinary services in the western division of Viti Levu, Fijis largest island. They have subsequently expanded to open a clinic in Savusavu providing the northern division with its first access to veterinary services. Legislation governing animal welfare in Fiji is virtually non-existent and non enforceable with the majority of legislation nearly 60 years old, and coupled with the limitations associated with operating as a charity, and virtually no support from the Fijian government, Animals Fiji faces a constant challenge in supporting both the domestic (and occasionally food producing) animals of Fiji. The main goal of Animals Fiji is breeding control within the free roaming and owned population of domestic animals of Fiji, largely through spay/neuter outreach programs. The clinic faces a wide range of problems not limited to hookworm, transmissible veneral tumour (TVT), acute paraquat intoxication and a number of other more common ailments. The lack of community knowledge and financial stability for most families facilitates progression of these cases to severe states, but Animals Fiji has a no turn away policy. Animals Fiji has noted a prominent number of animals since its conception infected with and suffering with clinical symptoms associated with *Dirofilaria immitis* (canine heartworm) and were keen to know more about the overall prevalence of the disease and the effectiveness of their treatment protocol within the shelter. The testing methods used in this study also provided information on a number of vector borne diseases including zoonoses of public health concern.

It’s possible to get stuck in a rut with Veterinary EMS in the UK. If you are willing to do a little more work alongside or in conjunction to your placement with a short research project, I would advise you to apply to the BVA Travel Grant scheme. There is funding out there in abundance, and there is no way to better re-ignite a passion in Veterinary Science than travelling abroad and experiencing the differences in clinical practice, the novel approaches to problems in the third world and the opportunity to further your knowledge and help your chosen establishment in whatever way you choose. The experience has been unforgettable!