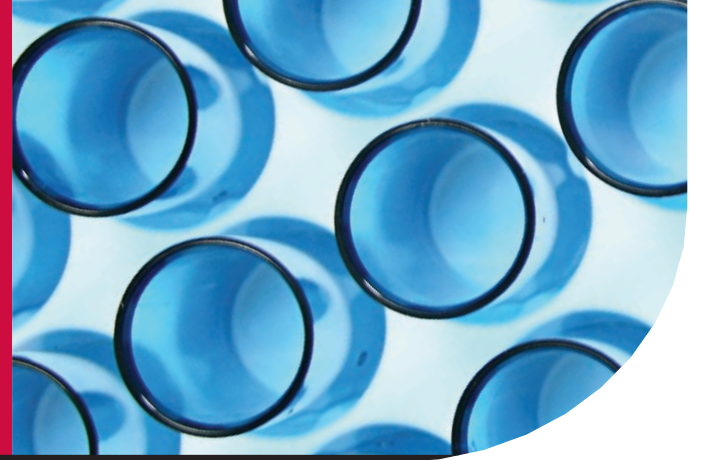


# Laboratory Products Focus



## Steaming Ahead in Veterinary Medicine

*As far as medical facilities go, it doesn't get much better than this.*

*12 world class specialists, six operating theatres with positive pressure ventilation, an intensive care facility, 13 consulting rooms, air-conditioned quarters for 100 patients, isolation facilities, treatment rooms, incubators, oxygen therapy chambers, high specification monitoring equipment, a decontamination unit, and the best diagnostic imaging department in its field in the UK.*

*And if the intended patients were humans, they would probably feel immensely comforted by the comprehensive array of up-to-date equipment, asepsis techniques and dedicated experts ready to care for them. As it is, the small animals that make up the patient list of Willows Veterinary Centre and Referral Service in Solihull, West Midlands, probably don't appreciate quite what an extraordinary place is taking care of them.*



### TRULY MULTI-DISCIPLINARY

Willows Veterinary Centre and Referral Service is one of the largest and best-equipped purpose-built private small animal hospitals in the UK, providing specialist referral services in every major discipline as well as catering for the everyday needs of local pet owners.

But it's a far cry from where it first started out in a cramped building five minutes down the road from the new practice. "The Centre was one of the first private referral practices in the UK," says Partner Peter Renwick. "From only seven staff in 1990, we've expanded to 85 over the last 19 years – and spent 12 of those looking for a new building because we grew so quickly."

The new premises cost £5 million to build and cover 32,000ft<sup>2</sup> - twelve times larger than the old practice - but the move wasn't just about relieving the over-crowding.

"We wanted to expand the specialist services we offered to our local clients and referring vets - previously just Orthopaedics, Spinal Surgery and Ophthalmology - to become a truly multi-disciplinary service. Finally, we now have the space, equipment and knowledge to offer Internal Medicine, Soft Tissue Surgery, Neurology, High-End Imaging – which includes a 16 slice CT scanner, full body MRI, ultrasound and fluoroscopy - plus High-Level Anaesthesia. In addition we also have conference facilities and run training courses for veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses."

### WHERE MICROBES MEET THEIR MATCH

Underpinning the service offered by the Centre is a strong commitment to best practice, and this is immediately noticeable when it comes to hygiene and asepsis practices.

*...people don't realise that superbugs like MRSA are a growing threat to small animals as well as they are to humans...*

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It is a common misconception that it isn't necessary for asepsis to be as rigorous in veterinary medicine as it is in human medicine. Nothing can be further from the truth.

"By and large, we face the same problems with hygiene that are faced by human hospitals," explains Peter. "Animals can suffer post-operative infections caused by the same range of pathogens as humans. Clostridium, Staphylococcus, Streptococcus and Pseudomonas, to name just a few, are all life-threatening pathogens. Also, people don't realise that superbugs like MRSA are a growing threat to small animals as they are to humans, and this point in particular is being pushed to the forefront of asepsis debates through the work of organisations like the Bella Moss Foundation."

"Unfortunately, animals are not as hygienic in their behaviour as people are. For example, dogs 'greet' each other in a completely different way to humans, so they're coming in laden with a variety of nasty bugs to start with. Then there's the possibility of transmission of bugs from the staff. For these reasons our hand hygiene protocols are thorough. There are alcohol gel dispensers on the front of every kennel, staff are trained to wash their hands properly, and instrument care and decontamination is rigorous."



### BUT WITH ANIMALS COMES AN ADDITIONAL OBSTACLE TO HYGIENE: HAIR.

"Our patients are very hairy and there's a lot of it to deal with after we've clipped them for surgery. We've installed special filters in the air handling system to deal with airborne hair, and we vacuum thoroughly and carefully to make sure as little hair as possible escapes the patient preparation area and gets through into theatre. In addition, there are separate washing facilities for animal blankets to ensure drapes and scrubs don't get contaminated."

It's clear that the Centre takes decontamination very seriously. The new facility has been designed to include a separate decontamination unit run by a dedicated member of staff and supported by trained nurses when needed.

"Almost all of our equipment has been designed for use with humans, so we have the same protocols for



cleaning and sterilising as a human hospital does. Used instruments, drapes and scrubs are taken from the surgical preparation room straight to the sterilisation room where they're inspected, run through instrument and garment washers, and put through ultrasonic cleaners and sterilisers."

Of all of the equipment, Peter credits the sterilisers as pivotal to the smooth running of the practice, and was very careful when choosing them for the decontamination unit.

"We had a small 70 litre steriliser in the old facility which was running day and night to keep up with our workload and was extremely unreliable. It would rarely go a month without breaking down, which was tedious and expensive to repair. I was anxious to avoid a repeat of this at the new facility and was determined to purchase a porous load steriliser that was as reliable as possible."

"Porous load sterilisers only started appearing in the veterinary field about 20 years ago and then it was limited to a few surgeries and the vet schools. A few years ago the standard means of sterilising equipment would have been a pressure cooker. They've started to appear more and more in private practices during the last 15 years, but there are still very, very few practices that have the kind of large sterilisers that we do."

Peter took his time and really did his research on the models available, ringing around different centres, laboratories, hospitals and sterile supply centres to talk to them about the autoclaves they use. Peter even rang every vet school in the UK to find out what equipment they used. "The implication of having to work with another autoclave that was unreliable was unthinkable. I wanted to know what sterilisers others had chosen, what they were like to use every day and whether there were any reliability, maintenance or service issues."

It all came down to a shortlist of three, and Peter

eventually chose two Astell 216 litre capacity Logicolor Square Section Sterilisers, which were built into the room to add an extra dimension of hygiene. "We didn't need to have all of that capacity," explained Peter, "but having the benefit of an equal-sized back up unit means we can keep functioning almost at the same level if there is ever a problem. Our previous back up steriliser was so small it made trying to work efficiently when the main one was down almost impossible."

Since being fitted, the glaring differences between the set up in the old and new practice have become even more apparent. "The new sterilisers are much more informative about what's going on during a cycle, and we're able to print off cycle logs for our records."

Previously with our old equipment, if you wanted to know what was going on you had to stand and just watch the dials for a while! Also having square chambers is a big advantage, as it is much easier to efficiently load the equipment and get a good fit, and the automatic doors are a nice touch and very user-friendly."

Peter's diligence researching the most appropriate up-to-date and advanced equipment for the Centre combined with the hard work of some of the UK's best veterinary specialists, is why Willows quickly achieved the accolade of a centre of excellence in the UK when its doors opened this year.

On the Centre's Open Day in September, members of veterinary world gathered together to tour the new facility and chat to the staff. Before leaving, visitors were asked to fill in a questionnaire where one of the questions asked was: 'Did you have any problems during the visit?' to which one veterinarian succinctly replied 'jealousy'.

The bar has been raised in small animal veterinary practice.

