

International Imports Resolve Vet Crisis

Hunter Equine Centre (HEC) overcomes COVID challenges in pursuit of leading international equine veterinarians

Progressive and young Scone-based practice, HEC, has proactively addressed a critical shortage of Australian veterinarians by importing seven highly credentialed international practitioners to service the needs of local thoroughbred trainers and leading Hunter Valley studs such as Edinglassie, Kia Ora, Lime Country, Newgate, Segenhoe and Yarraman.

Practice owner Dr. Bridget Bester explains that “It is well recognised that there is a national shortage of veterinarians in Australia, and the rural and equine sectors have been hardest hit. Fortunately, all the senior veterinarians in the practice have worked internationally at world-class practices in Kentucky, Ireland, Newmarket and Yorkshire and we’ve been able to attract first-class colleagues from across the globe.

Over the years we’ve had fabulous veterinarians from these places and we’ve made a point of ensuring that it is well known that HEC is a great place to work, with excellent standards and a very healthy work culture. These new recruits are crucial to the expansion of our service.

It has been more stressful – not to mention expensive - than ever bringing veterinarians in this year, with tough visa and border restrictions, and the sudden cancellation of so many flights in the last few weeks. We’ve been working around the clock with immigration lawyers and specialist travel agents to get our team here.”

The new recruits:

Currently in hotel quarantine is ‘power couple’, both boarded specialists, surgeon Dr. Rachel Agass and her husband, theriogenologist Dr. Rory Gormley.

No stranger to Australia, Rachel worked at Bendigo Equine Hospital in Victoria, a busy thoroughbred broodmare, foal and yearling practice after graduating from The Royal Veterinary College in London where she developed her initial interest in surgery, including lameness diagnosis and management. Now a board-certified European Specialist in Equine Surgery, Rachel returns to Australia with particular interest in the management of developmental orthopaedic diseases of the thoroughbred.

Irishman Rory returns to Australia as a Diplomate of the American College of Theriogenologists - a recognised specialist in equine reproduction. Early in his career Rory also practiced at Bendigo Equine Hospital where on his first shuttle from a leading equine fertility practice in Yorkshire in the UK (Equine Reproductive Services) he dealt predominantly with chilled and frozen AI for standardbreds before later returning for two southern hemisphere seasons for a thoroughbred stud-based role. Since then, Rory has practiced at Fethard Equine Hospital in Ireland providing services to Coolmore, and numerous other thoroughbred farms and racing yards before returning to Equine Reproductive Services four years ago. Rory has a particular interest in treatment of the sub-fertile mare, foal and yearling medicine and thoroughbred sales work.

Rory and Rachel have worked closely over the years with Hunter Equine Centre Australian and European Registered medicine specialist Dr. Sarah Gough and HEC senior stud veterinarian Dr. James Dawson, both in Victoria and during their residencies in the UK.

Also in quarantine, off a stallion flight, after spending the last eight back-to-back seasons shuttling between HEC and Darley's Kildangan Stud in Ireland, is Italian, Dr. Livia De Biase. Livia's main interests are stud work and neonatology, and she is currently completing the Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Practice through the Royal Veterinary College in the UK.

Awaiting the final stamp on his visa, well-regarded stud veterinarian, Dr. Chris Phillips is poised and ready to fly over from New Zealand. Like Rachel, Chris is a graduate of The Royal Veterinary College in London. Employed after graduating by Rosssdales and Partners in Newmarket, Chris has names behind him such as Juddmonte, Newsells Park, The Royal Studs and Cheveley Park Stud. Alongside his thoroughbred stud equine reproduction work in the UK, Chris was heavily involved in stallion reproduction and subfertility management. While at Rosssdales, Chris also developed the practice's semen freezing service and approved semen freezing laboratory, and was significantly involved in the practice's artificial insemination and embryo transfer programmes. For the last 7 years, Chris has been managing veterinarian for Waikato Stud in New Zealand. He is an approved consultant for first season subfertility insurance and has held an advisory position for the NZEVA. Outside of work, Chris breeds thoroughbreds and has had notable success with breeding the recent G1 Queensland Derby winner, Kukeracha.

Flying over this week is Irish stud veterinarian, Dr. Jane Holohan. Since graduating from the University College of Dublin, Jane has worked in Ireland at Fethard Equine Hospital, Tullyraine Equine Clinic and most recently at Mullingar Equine, a busy stud medicine ambulatory practice. Jane will be an important cog in the HEC wheel and will cover stud work, first opinion ambulatory work, in house lameness work ups and anaesthesia in our hospital. The forthcoming season will be Jane's first in Australia.

Providing experience to the specialists of the future and showing them the opportunities that are available in Australia is also important to HEC. Dr. Olivia Tomlin Netherwood has, and Dr. Rebecca Gordon will also be joining Bridget and her team for the 2021 season. Olivia, who has previously worked with Sarah at Rainbow Equine in the UK, travelled to Australia earlier this year and is already a familiar face around the Valley. Rebecca has been employed since qualifying from University College Dublin in mid-2019 at Comeragh Veterinary in Co. Waterford in Ireland and is due in Australia in the coming weeks.

The veterinary crisis is multi-faceted with much discussion surrounding burn-out, compassion fatigue and mental health the main offenders. While the industry continues to address these issues HEC is demonstrating that opportunities abound for those looking for great experience in Australia's horse capital.