

Conference, Cycling, Friends and Family

Recently Steve and myself were hugely fortunate to attend the 2025 Royal Canin Conference in Montpellier, France. I actually won my place 6 months ago, when I entered a competition to write on a Royal Canin prescription diet that helped with a medical case. Naturally I couldn't leave Steve behind.

Despite traveling over 50+ hours to reach our destination and arriving in Montpellier to 10 degrees and rain, the conference held at The Corum was fantastic from start to finish. We met up with the Royal Canin Australasia crew, and got acquainted. A great bunch of people to spend the best part of a week with, spanning the ages with Steve and I being the oldies of the group.

Day One was a trip to Royal Canin global headquarters and plant located in Aimargues, a town in the South of France. This site is the company's central hub for research, development and global operations.

Established in 1968 by veterinarian Jean Cathary, Royal Canin (RC) has grown into a world leader in pet nutrition, specialising in tailored diets for cats and dogs. He started this journey with his own dog, a German Shepherd with eczema, as he could see as soon as prescribed medication ceased, the skin disease reoccurred. With this visionary act the Royal Canin brand was born.



Royal Canin Headquarters and Processing plant



Gala dinner with the team from Australasia

We were taken on a tour through the plant and saw the entire process of manufacturing and production - a fastidious, accurate, organised, scientific process making sure only the very BEST food is bagged up ready for your pets consumption. I was blown away by the research that goes into the food process. The best part was seeing the research centre which houses the dogs and cats of all breeds. Where they sleep, eat and exercise with others is first class and all the animals looked extremely happy and healthy.



The next two days were spent in lecture theatres - my happy place. The focus on the conference was successful weight loss programmes for the obese pet and nutrition in diabetic patients. Early desexing was also discussed in relation to weight gain, behavioural and medical issues.

There was a technology stream exploring Artificial Intelligence in the veterinary world and possible benefits. Positive communication and psychological safety within vet clinic teams has huge flow on benefits for a healthy practice and I was really interested in what Generation Z require from veterinarians in the C21st.

Now I'll share the fun facts I learnt this week..

What NextGen expect from your veterinary team

- Being on the social media platforms this generation browse, namely Tik Tok and Instagram.
- For us to embrace digitisation and be open to their suggestions on what content they want to see
- They want "information" about you, your services, your team and what to expect when they bring their very special pet in for a stay
- They want video and photo updates and where possible, video calls with their pet to keep in touch
- TRUST is everything

So I guess McMaster & Heap need to get on the right social pages to connect with a hugely important group of young newly devoted pet owners.

Weight management in Diabetic Cats

- Obese cats are 4x more likely to develop diabetes, typically between 8-10 years of age.
- Medical management with insulin ALWAYS takes priority.
- Weight management takes priority over therapeutic diabetic diets. These cats MUST lose weight first, which will lessen their insulin requirements possibly leading to complete remission eventually.
- BUT when introducing a new diet you must consider the cats appetite and whether it will accept a new food, whether the cat is stable with its insulin dose and whether the pet owner can cope with another change to their cats routine.
- If these diabetic cats are underweight they need a high energy/protein diet to get their body condition score up, a recovery or growth diet
- We need to allow 10% of the cats diet to "treats", and we factor this into the amount fed. Clients enjoy treating their cats and rewards after a jab of insulin is an important part off the process.

The debate of when to DESEX your pet

- Not an easy one as there are pros and cons to early desexing. A thorough discussion with your vet is required so you make the best decision.
- Early desexing can certainly help with unwanted behavioural issues such as dog aggressiveness, roaming, increased libido, urine marking and biting.
- Large breed dogs should not be desexed until body growth has been completed. Desexing later can reduce the likelihood of orthopedic/neoplastic diseases, obesity, urinary incontinence and some behavioural issues.
- Prepubertal desexing should be avoided in dogs with behavioural issues.
- Also early neutering in cats can affect height, muscle mass and fat deposition. After 20 weeks of age, cats eat more food, their demands are higher so this drives obesity. There is no increased risks of cancer in neutering cats young. Cats neutered early are deprived of individual growth hormone which leads to a smaller size and leaner muscle mass.

Artificial Intelligence is here for Veterinarians

- A new algorithm has been developed to predict the risk of your cat becoming diabetic. It requires some of your cats personal info (including breed, age, weight and body condition score and 4 blood test values).

This gives a predictive index of whether your cat is heading into a life of diabetes. This isn't yet available as still being worked on but could be an excellent predictor for those "chonky" cats.

- Royal Canin has developed an AI weight management app that we will be implementing. It recommends the best foods to feed, daily amounts, costs per day and how long it takes to loss the desired weight

Reading Pet food labels correctly

- Dogs & cats are carnivorous and thus require a high protein diet, high fat and low carbohydrate diets
- Life-stage diets (Puppy, lactation, maintenance and gestation) are important as they provide all the nutrients needed at specific periods in a pets life. Dogs and cats need between 43-45 essential nutrients as they can't process these themselves. Vitamin C is an essential nutrient as it can't be synthesised. Cats also can't make Taurine or Arachidonic acid so need this supplied in the diet.
- Grain added to the food isn't just a cheap filler - its a source of energy, providing protein, EFA's, linoleum acid, niacin, folate etc
- Dogs are NOT susceptible to Celiac disease like people so can eat wheat
- There is an association between DCM (Dilated Cardiomyopathy) and unconventional diets containing peas, lentils, other legume seeds and potatoes as the main ingredients. This form of DCM causing heart disease can't be explained by taurine deficiency alone.
- BARF (raw food diets) are not straight forward to feed. As well as considering the quality and digestibility of ingredients, raw meat is often contaminated with bacteria such as salmonella and listeria which as well as causing gastroenteritis in your pet, is also an issue for young children, the elderly and compromised people. Many BARF diets are not complete and balanced, compromising puppies and kittens dietary health.

All in all a fabulous round the world holiday for Steve and I. After our week of "learning", we spent 8 days cycling 55kms a day in Puglia, Southern Italy (the heel of Italy - highly recommended), then visited our best friend in Germany where Steve helped out with some tricky Ophthalmology cases, even performing eye surgery on a German Public Holiday. Our last stop was Houston where we spent fun, happy family times with our son Dylan and Alex.



Dogs seek me out



Cycling in Puglia



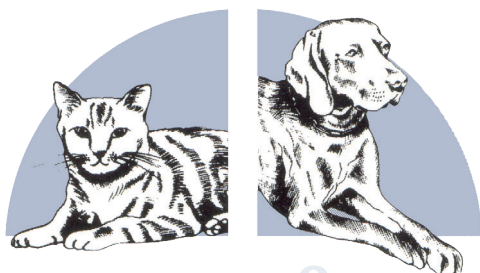
Steve performing eye surgery in Germany



Dylan and his mum

Many Thanks to UVG for sponsoring my week in Montpellier and to Royal Canin for a fabulous, well put together and thought out conference. Now looking forward to getting home and being with Macy, Atticus and Maximus again.

Dr Michele McMaster, May 2025



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