

ASAV accredited hospitals

The ASAV Accredited Veterinary Hospital Scheme recognises companion animal practices that achieve the highest levels of quality care and practice management in innovative hospital facilities. Those hospitals that gain accreditation set a benchmark to inspire other small animal practitioners when assessing their own facilities and standards. It also operates as a kind of quality assurance program for clients, promoting excellence in three main areas: medical records, radiological records and the facility itself.



Fulham Gardens Animal Hospital and Wayville Animal Hospital

Some of the successful Fulham Gardens team with co-owner Alan Dalgarno

Fulham Gardens Animal Hospital and Wayville Animal Hospital in Adelaide belong to the 'Pets and their people' group of veterinary businesses owned by Veronica (Vron) Wah Day and Alan Dalgarno. Vron and Alan have been business partners since 2006 but founded Pets and their People in 2013.

Fulham Gardens Animal Hospital is located Adelaide's leafy western suburbs. It's open seven days a week and although the staff numbers can fluctuate from time to time, Vron describes it being "a four- or five-vet hospital" over the past year.

Vron does the weekly rosters for the team and tries to keep a 2:1 ratio of veterinary support staff to vets at Fulham wherever possible.

"We have pure reception staff as well who aren't generally vet nurses, so we'll always have two receptionists on" she says. "And so there's normally five or six vet nurses, as well as team leaders."

Wayville Animal Hospital is a little smaller than Fulham Gardens. It's located in the inner-southern suburb of Wayville in Adelaide, near the southern parklands. Vron explains that having two vets and four vet nurses on duty is the standard for the daily roster there.

As for the clientele of the two hospitals, Vron suggests that Fulham Gardens probably has a bit more of a varied group of customers than its sister site in Wayville.

"We get a lot more of a mixed demographic at Fulham Gardens because they're open seven days a week, she says. "And on a Sunday, we get quite a range of people who will come in who will use us who aren't necessarily a normal regular client ... a lot of

them do stay, simply because they know that we're there.

"At Fulham Gardens, we're open till nine o'clock at night Monday to Friday, 9 am – 5 pm on Saturday and 10 am – 4 pm on Sunday. So it's not token hours on a Sunday ... It's a reasonable stint and I think people do appreciate it."

Wayville Animal Hospital is closer to the city than Fulham Gardens, and Vron says the team there tend to see "lots of professionals in townhouses". She describes the clientele there as perhaps a little more well-off than those at Fulham Gardens, but adds that there is quite a mixed demographics at both hospitals.

The patients at both hospitals are mostly cats and dogs, however, the staff also see reasonable number of koalas.

Vron explains that this is "mainly because when we had the bushfires here ... Alan was really involved with the koala rescue groups,



Some of the proud Wayville Animal Hospital team with co-owner Vron Wah Day (far left)

so they will often bring in rescued koalas for us to have a look at.”

One of the vets at Fullham Gardens is also very passionate about rabbits, so from time to time, the staff there will also see some bunnies as well.

Vron and Alan are very proud of all their veterinary businesses, and the idea of earning ASAV hospital accreditation was something they considered for a long time before actually committing to the process.

“It’s something that’s kind of been on my back burner (and Alan’s) for quite a number of years, Vron says. “Part of it I guess was for me as an owner, it was something that I’d like to achieve – to have the hospitals get to that status.

“A lot of it though, in the later years, came down to being able to have staff go, ‘This is the standard to which we can practise.’

“For us, we’ve been striving towards this kind of level for quite a while. So we had a lot of those policies and procedures already in place. And those needed tweaking rather than complete implementation, if that makes

sense. So I think the standard was there for quite a while, but just to be able to have it cemented in, was important for us.

“And probably a little bit of it is that it’s just an achievement to be able to go, ‘Yep, we’re running and keeping these hospitals at this level, which I think for us as owners, is important as well.”

Vron goes on to say that she and Alan also found it useful to talk to other practice owners and that the other vets they spoke to were quite happy to collaborate by sharing their own knowledge and experiences of the ASAV hospital accreditation process.

“I’ve always said you don’t always have to reinvent the wheel,” Vron says.

“Some people have got great ideas and it’s just a matter of asking them for permission and then copying their great ideas! Different approaches to things can work really well and being able to talk directly to people who are in a similar environment was really, really handy.”

Because Vron and Alan did some pre-planning for the accreditation process well

ahead of actually starting it, they were able to take the building requirements for ASAV accredited hospitals into account when they were renovating their Wayville Animal Hospital in 2018. The aim was to create an ASAV-standard hospital while still maintaining the beautiful heritage features that came with the building.

“Because I’m a surgeon I was really specifically focusing on the requirements of the surgery room. For example, I wanted to make sure that there were no lips on any framework to prevent any dust collecting. This was an essential component of our design,” Vron says.

After settling in for a couple of years, Vron and Alan were ready to officially start their accreditation journey around the end of 2019 or early 2020 – just in time for the pandemic!

When asked about the coincidence of timing, Vron sees it in a glass half-full kind of way: “It ended up being a really good distraction,” she says brightly.

“Yes, we were busy, but we work hard in a number of ways to be able to provide staff satisfaction as well. So we were well staffed during the pandemic, which obviously helped with the extra workflow that we had. But it was also a source of distraction for the staff, so it gave them something else to focus on.”

She also points out that because she and Alan had done their research into what the hospital accreditation process entailed, they were under no illusions about the size and complexity of the job ahead of them.

“We knew it would probably take us a good two years,” she says.

“We didn’t change a lot of policies; we tweaked a lot of things ... Alana Dowdell was overseeing it. She’s our clinical manager and in reality, she deserves so much more of the credit for it than either Al or me because she did so much of it.”

Although the staff didn’t have to make any substantial changes to their work practices and protocols to earn their ASAV hospital accreditation, Vron says the one thing that has probably made one of the biggest differences to their daily work, and especially the work of the vets, was getting a new X-ray system.

“We’ve been digital for a very long time, so over 10 years,” Vron says. “And we ended up having to upgrade our system to be able to meet the requirements for the radiology assessment.”

It was quite a big purchasing decision, but they have no regrets.

“It’s that kind of thing where I can go, ‘Yes! I’ve got happy vets now who aren’t getting frustrated by bad X-rays, which is then time-saving for everyone – patients and all

the vet staff if they get to take things just once and not twice,” Vron explains. “And it’s a worthwhile investment because it makes the staff happier and they know that they’re doing a better job.”

When the time came for the Fullham Gardens and Wayville hospitals to be formally inspected earlier this year, the hospital inspector turned out to be David Neck from Western Australia.

Western Australia’s hard border closures had made it difficult for him to travel for many months, and he did have to delay his trip a couple of times. But happily, when he did eventually get to Adelaide, he was able to do both the Fullham Gardens and Wayville hospitals on the same day.

Vron says the staff at the hospitals were a little nervous ahead of the big visit, but that David was very friendly and immediately put everyone at ease.

“He was really lovely. He was just so easy to talk to, so approachable,” she says.

Alana met with David first at the Wayville hospital because Vron had another commitment that morning and she planned to meet him at Fullham Gardens after he’d finished the first inspection. However, the day turned out to be far more eventful than anyone was anticipating.

“As I got there, Alana messaged me to go, ‘Cool, we’re on our way,’” Vron says. “And literally while they were on their way over, we had the police bring in a dog that had been stabbed by someone armed with a knife.

“So, while he’s there trying to do his inspection, we’re trying to deal with the fact that there’s police out the front and there’s a

dog bleeding everywhere. It was awful, but the dog survived.

“It was almost one of those things where I’m like: ‘Is this just something that’s meant to really test us on a day when we’re stressed? Or was it designed to actually show him how this place runs in an emergency?’

“And the team just handled it.

“It was almost like it doesn’t matter that there’s an inspector here, we’re just going to deal with this, because this is what we do. It actually took the stress away from him being there because I was thinking, ‘I know you’re here, but you’re not my priority at the moment.’”

Despite the distressing case at Fullham Gardens, both inspections went well and Vron recalls she felt very proud when David commented to her: “Not only have you met the standard, but you’re far surpassing it with the hospitals that you’ve got.”

And who wouldn’t want to hear that?!

That was around six months ago now, so Vron has had plenty of time to reflect on their hospital teams’ accreditation journey. So does she have any thoughts on what was the most difficult part of it all?

“I think the hardest part is change,” she replies.

She goes on to explain that she and Alan also had to ponder some tricky questions along the way, like: “How do we make the changes that we need so that we keep up to the correct standard that we want, while still trying to make it time-efficient for the staff (especially for things like history writing)?

“It’s a big thing for vets because it takes them longer. And we know it takes them longer.

So I think that was probably the biggest thing for the staff – just making that change to a different system so that we can make sure that we were keeping up to the way that ASAV wanted it done.”

Undoubtedly, this sort of professional achievement takes perseverance, faith, teamwork, and lots of hard work. But now that they’ve reached their big goal, what does Vron what she like best about running two ASAV Hospitals of Excellence?

“The veterinary industry is in a little bit of a crisis at the moment and I think the best bit for me is that our team could work together to go, ‘Yep, this is the standard that we’re setting,’” she says.

“I can go, ‘Cool, I know that we can uphold this kind of standard while still maintaining a really, really good workplace for staff.” 🐾

The ‘Pets and their people’ group also includes a third veterinary practice in Adelaide called **Unley Vet Surgery**. It’s located in a heritage-listed building and unfortunately because there is no room for an isolation ward on the premises, the team there were unable to go through the accreditation process at the same time as their colleagues at the Fullham Gardens and Wayville sister sites. However, all team members across all three veterinary businesses follow exactly the same policies and procedures and rigorous professional standards in their work.

All photos courtesy of Fullham Gardens and Wayville Animal Hospitals



Clinical manager Alana Dowdell (who works across all three veterinary businesses) did a lot of the work for the accreditation process



Vet nurse Natalie (from the Fullham Gardens hospital) assisting a feathered friend