NEW KID ON THE BLOCK

▸▸▸ Alex Hung

Alex enjoys tipping sheep and performing a physical examination during a practical session at Sydney University's Livestock Veterinary Teaching and Research Unit in Camden, Sydney

All photos courtesy of Alex Hung

My love for animals started when I was very young. I have immigrant parents who don't speak English, so when I was growing up there were only two channels on the TV we could watch and understand at home: the Chinese network or Discovery Channel. My dad and I would stay up way past bedtime (much to Mum's dismay) watching lions and wolves hunting for prey and it was so fascinating!

For many years, my brother and I would beg for a dog. Eventually, my parents finally caved in and they brought home Cash, a Yorkie-Shih Tzu cross when I was just about to start high school. When I took him to get vaccines, the vet I met was so inspiring. It was obvious he was so passionate about animals, sharing his knowledge to ensure that Cash would have a good start to life. I always thought I was going to go into teaching, but after that first vet visit, I changed gears and considered veterinary medicine. To this day, we still keep in touch. I even undertook placements at his hospital while I was in vet school and worked for him as a veterinary assistant!

I left Canada (my home country) in February 2017 and flew from sub-zero temperatures (the airline was de-icing the plane and delayed my flight by two hours) to sunny Australia to enrol in the University of Sydney's Doctor of Veterinary Medicine program.

The thought of going back into studying was daunting at first, as I took a couple years off after completing my undergraduate degree to work. I knew it was going to be a challenge along with immersing myself in the culture of a new country. From late night group study sessions at the 24-hour library, to getting involved with the Veterinary Society at uni, as well as being the Hill's representative for my year, I had to learn to plan ahead to ensure that I had time set aside to recharge my mental battery.

The immense amount of practical experience I gained throughout the four years of study was taxing but very rewarding. Some of my notable work placement experiences started with a dairy farm in Avoca, NSW, to get animal handling experience in first year. Waking up at 2 am to herd cows and milking them before 8 am and again by 5 pm made me realise how much work and commitment farmers go through and how thankful we should be for them. A special highlight from that placement was delivering multiple calves using a calf puller.

Another fantastic placement I had was working at the Dolphin Marine Conservation Park in Coffs Harbour, NSW. As part of this experience, we performed physical exams on dolphins, did many post-mortems on turtles to collect samples for research, and I was even involved in an ultrasound on one of the seals who was pregnant! My final-year

Alex performing a spay and unilateral chain mastectomy on a dog alongside Dr Karmen Fong at Vet HQ Double Bay

Alex during Mardi Gras 2021 parade preparations with Australian Rainbow Vets, alongside classmate Anjuli Dabydeen

placements were physically and mentally demanding. I knew I was going to be a small animal vet, but I still made the most out of my large animal placements. One highlight for me while I was at the university teaching hospital out in Camden, NSW was a call out for a caesarean of a Charolais cow in heavy rain for two hours – my coveralls were drenched but watching the calf warm up to its mother in the end made the experience worth it!

Another memorable moment was scrubbing into an emergency colic surgery which started at 3 am while I was on an ECC shift that went until sunrise. It really showed me that teamwork and communication is an essential part of veterinary medicine, together with the nurses, interns and specialists to ensure the best outcome for the patient.

I've enjoyed my time in Australia and have decided to stay here, in the hope of obtaining permanent residency/citizenship. I'm starting out at Vet HQ in Double Bay and Darlinghurst in Sydney, where I am supported by an amazing team of vets and nurses. I have only been working for a handful of months so far, and I can see already that there is a steep learning curve from studying to working as a vet. I'm slowly becoming more comfortable in doing routine procedures and figuring out treatment plans on my own and am seeing growth from when I started. I am thankful for Dr Geoff Golovsky and Dr Jessica Green for their patience and mentorship while I learn the ins and outs of the practice, so I can practise to the best of my ability.

Although I am very happy working in small animal private practice, I hope to be as involved as I can with some of my other veterinary interests as well. The clinic I working for is involved with Pets in the Park, a charity organisation providing health care to pets of owners in financial need. I also want to be more involved with Australian Rainbow Vets, whom you may have seen at the most recent Mardi Gras Parade!

In essence, I am very thankful and privileged to have graduated from veterinary school and being supported by my colleagues. Many other vets have been an integral part of my commitment to learning, notably Dr Julia Crawford, my mentor from the AVA mentoring program. I'd also like to thank all the vets and vet nurses (in Canada and in Australia) who have inspired me to pursue my passions for veterinary medicine. 🐾