

Animal care continues during COVID-19, writes Ranauld Leask

While human medicine takes centre stage, vets, vet nurses and researchers dedicated to caring for our pets and livestock, continue their work.

The University's Easter Bush campus is home to some of the world's foremost animal health experts. As with their counterparts in human medicine, they're responding to the current crisis with innovation and dedication.

A number of researchers at the Roslin Institute are currently investigating various aspects of Covid-19 in an effort to find ways to combat the infection.

Continuity of care

At the Royal (Dick) School for Veterinary Studies Hospital for Small Animals, familiar to many members of the public for the care given to beloved family pets, work continues to provide diagnosis and treatment, albeit with adjustments. Keeping staff, students, clients and their animals safe is the first priority, with new methods of team working now in place, to minimise possible exposure to the virus.

Dr Sue Murphy is Director of the Small Animal Hospital: "By working within the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons guidelines of seeing only urgent or emergency cases we are protecting the public and our staff, as well as ensuring the welfare of the animals under our care isn't compromised."

The Vet School has made available essential medical kit to NHS Lothian, with the provision of four ventilator machines and the donation of 450 surgical masks, and a quantity of surgical scrubs.

Looking after livestock

Large animal care responsibilities also continue for staff and students at Easter Bush. For many in the agricultural industry, Covid-19 could not have come at a worst time, as spring lambs and calves are born. The University's Farm Animal Hospital and Practice provides essential advice to farmers and vets around the UK.

Keeping the nation fed requires healthy, productive livestock, meaning the role of vets and vet nurses is crucial. These professionals have adopted new working practices that enable them to continue to attend sick animals, while minimising contact with others.

Online support

With campus teaching suspended, keeping in touch online has become evermore vital. One example the Vet School has employed is the 'Bit of Fresh Air' Facebook sessions. Hosted every Monday afternoon for vet students, the interactive sessions are led by Lecturer in Veterinary Clinical Skills, Caroline Mosley.

Caroline says: "There is a very strong feeling of cohesiveness at Easter Bush, so losing this at a critical time of the year – in the run up to graduation – we wanted to give our students some way of staying in touch with staff. We have had some lovely feedback from students, saying they are missing Scotland and the University and that it was lovely to be on the live video and just see a bit of the outdoors, plus the animals that feature in them have been popular too."

Making a difference

Staff and students are also volunteering at local charities, such as the Cyrenians and Trussell Trust, which support people who are disadvantaged and living in poverty.

Julian Mashingaidze, in his first year of a BSc in Global Agriculture and Food Security, says that while tiring, his

voluntary work in a distribution warehouse has been very rewarding: “The Covid-19 situation had led me to start feeling useless and demotivated, but through helping out I have found a purpose. It has helped immensely with my mental health, which I’d been struggling with recently. Now I’m doing something that uplifts the local Edinburgh community while keeping me busy.”

Practical assistance has also been the aim of Amanda Warr, a post-doctoral researcher at the Roslin Institute. She has used her own 3-D printer to produce plastic components for face shields. These are used by front line NHS and care staff to protect themselves.

Amanda has already produced parts for more than 500 shields: “We get sent photos of workers wearing the shields, which is lovely and really reminds you that every shield is helping to protect a real person who is in a dangerous situation. It is heart warming to see them, and of course we are very grateful for everything they are doing.”

Donations to help Amanda’s efforts can be made at her GoFundMe page, [here](#).

For Professor David Argyle, Dean of Veterinary Medicine, the key to overcoming this crisis is by calling upon the sense of unity traditionally enjoyed by staff and students at Easter Bush: “We have always had a really strong sense of community. These efforts to support the greatest public health crisis in decades shows our students and staff working together at their best through hugely challenging circumstances.”

This article was originally published on the University of Edinburgh Covid-19 Responses website: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/covid-19-response/our-community/animal-care-remains-priority-during-covid-crisis>

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