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Exotic Companion Animal Medicine and Surgery

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New leadership in the renamed section makes big plans to better serve patients and students

BY ANNAMARIE SARACINO

Reptiles, birds, ferrets, rabbits and other small companion animals have a new name at Ryan Hospital — Exotic Companion Animals. Formerly, these animals were known as “special species” and owners would make appointments with the Special Species Medicine and Surgery Section. Now, owners and referring vets will be bringing and sending these animals to the Exotic Companion Animal Medicine and Surgery Service.

“We wanted to change the section name to something that was a little more straightforward,” said Nicole Wyre, DVM recently appointed section chief. “We think this new name will speak to everyone who owns these kinds of companion animals and be a little less ambiguous than ‘Special Species.’ And, of course, our clients and their pets will still receive the best level of animal care that they’ve come to expect from our hospital.”

Updating the section name was just one of Dr. Wyre’s first matters of business. She also has big plans for extending appointment hours, recharging the section’s internship and residency programs and adding new leadership to her team.

Increased Availability, Accessibility and Expertise

The Exotic Companion Animal Medicine and Surgery Service is the first at Ryan Hospital to extend appointment hours to seven days a week.

“The main focus in extending daily and weekend hours is client convenience,” said La’Toya Latney, DVM, staff clinician in the service. “If clients are in a pinch, they know where they can take their animal. There is a deficit in the veterinary care community regarding extended hours, especially for these species of animals, and it is up to us to try to accommodate clients and patients.”

These extended hours mean more access for avian and exotic pet owners, but it also means more access to these kinds of pets for all certified veterinary technicians, interns, residents and students at Ryan Hospital, each of

whom will be trained by Dr. Wyre’s team to properly handle and care for these sensitive patients.

“It’s a matter of safety for our staff, and most importantly the animals being handled,” said Dr. Wyre.

In addition, the wider exposure to avian and exotic species will provide an opportunity for students to explore a specialty in this area of veterinary medicine.

Extending Internships and Residencies

The internship program will also become more substantial under Dr. Wyre’s leadership and will include weekly rounds, journal discussions and advanced, hands-on learning of rotations through local aquariums, wildlife institutions and zoos.

“We will be revamping our rounds scheduling to increase our interns’ ability to have hands-on experience working with these species,” said Dr. Wyre, “and we’ll be offering additional learning opportunities through traveling to other hospitals, aquariums, rescue organizations and zoos.”



section leadership


Currently, the Exotic Companion Animal Medicine and Surgery Service includes three full-time specialists, two interns and numerous students.

In addition to bringing two interns, Drs. Colin McDermott and Susan Pello, onboard, a residency program is another of Dr. Wyre's priorities.

The American College of Zoologic Medicine Zoologic Companion Animal Residency will be a three-year program with focuses on avian medicine and surgery, reptile medicine and surgery, small mammals and exotics case studies, all of which will allow for evidence-based approaches to exotic species studies. Dr. Wyre is advocating for this program to be part of the school's core curriculum rather than electives.

"With exotics becoming more popular pets, I feel that every veterinarian and technician should know the basics of handling and treating exotic companion animals," said Dr. Wyre.

This quarter Dr. Wyre is giving lectures to the first-year students in the Introduction to Clinical Veterinary Medicine course and both Dr. Latney and Dr. Wyre will be course leaders for four elective exotic courses for the third-year students, offering early and continuing exposure to working with these species of animals.

"Along with the important research aspect that Dr. Latney is bringing to the table, we will be ahead of the game through being able to apply clinical research and have the ability to advance veterinary medicine," said Dr. Wyre. 



DR. LA'TOYA LATNEY

As far as she can remember, Dr. La'Toya Latney has always been fascinated with reptiles and exotic animals. As a result, Dr. Latney pursued an undergraduate degree in biological sciences from Cornell University, and later attended Ross Veterinary School in New Brunswick, NJ where she earned her DVM. Next was an internship at the Island Exotic Veterinary Care in Huntington Station, NY. In 2008, Dr. Latney joined the special species service as a resident. "I get excited about going into work and witnessing the enthusiasm that clients have for their pets," said Dr. Latney. Dr. Latney is working on her master's in clinical epidemiology and conducting a clinical trial that helps measure reptile pain through the VCIC. Currently, she is on appointments by request, but will be re-joining us full-time after the completion of her degree.



DR. CHRISTOPHER MONTGOMERY

Dr. Christopher Montgomery found his passion for avian and exotic animal medicine while growing up on a farm in Louisiana. "I grew up surrounded by a plethora of animals, and I always wanted to work with the ones that no one really knew anything about," said Dr. Montgomery. After earning his undergraduate degree in biochemistry and zoology at Louisiana State University, Dr. Montgomery spent four years at LSU's School of Veterinary Medicine and then completed an externship at the Baton Rouge Zoo in the Avian and Exotics Program. Next for Dr. Montgomery was a few years in private practice, followed by a Zoo Medicine and Surgery Residency at the Philadelphia Zoo. From there, Dr. Montgomery joined Penn Vet's Ryan Hospital as a staff vet. "It's a constant, daily challenge," said Dr. Montgomery of his work at Ryan Hospital.



DR. NICOLE WYRE

Leading the charge of the service, Dr. Nicole Wyre received her DVM from Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine. She then completed the Avian and Exotic Residency Program at New York's Animal Medical Center, after which she joined Penn Vet as a lecturer. After just a few months in that role, however, Dr. Wyre had an opportunity to move to Hong Kong to serve as a consultant at a small animal and exotics practice, which she seized. This spring, because she missed teaching, Dr. Wyre came back to Penn Vet, this time taking the role of section chief in the Exotic Companion Animal Medicine and Surgery Service. "If you teach one person, they can spread the word on to others," she said.