Introducing...

Dr. Mark Westman worked as a veterinarian at RSPCA NSW for five years and Senior Veterinarian at AWL NSW for four years before returning to the University of Sydney to complete a PhD in feline infectious diseases. Mark is particularly interested in the diagnosis of feline retroviral diseases (FIV and FeLV), especially in the shelter setting where incorrect diagnosis can lead to unnecessary euthanasia of cats. Mark also help found Pets in the Park, a national charity aimed at caring for pets owned by homeless people, and sits on the board for the Sydney Dogs and Cats Home.

Pets In The Park

Pets in the Park (PITP) is a national charity established in 2012 with the mission of improving the lives of homeless people by caring for their pets. PITP recognizes homelessness is a complex issue requiring a multi-faceted approach for positive change. Recognition of the power of the human-animal bond, in particular to provide companionship and purpose, is central to PITP's purpose. PITP has established monthly 'pop up' health clinics (two in Melbourne and two in Sydney) where volunteer veterinarians and veterinary nurses vaccinate, administer flea and worm treatment and conduct basic consultations for pets owned by homeless people. Pets requiring further work between health clinics (e.g. surgeries, dentals) are cared for by PITP partner practices. PITP also organises quarterly de-sexing and micro-chipping clinics for pets seen at the health clinics. All services and products provided by PITP are free to clients. Key to PITP's success is partnering with human service providers to encourage a cross-discipline approach to improving the lives of homeless people and their pets.

Determining the true FIV infection status in FIV-vaccinated cats using rapid point-of-care kits

Determining the feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) infection status of FIV-vaccinated cats using point-of-care kits is currently thought not to be possible because antibodies produced in FIV-vaccinated and naturally-infected cats are indistinguishable. We compared three antibody kits in a population of 119 FIV-vaccinated and 239 FIV-unvaccinated cats. FIV status was assigned by considering the results of all antibody kits in concert with results from a commercial PCR assay. Two lateral flow kits (Witness FeLV/FIV; Anigen Rapid FIV/FeLV) had excellent overall sensitivity (100%; 100%) and specificity (98%; 100%) and could discern the true FIV infection status of cats, irrespective of FIV-vaccination history. The lateral flow ELISA kit (SNAP FIV/FeLV Combo) could not determine if antibodies detected were due to FIV-vaccination, FIV-infection, or both. The sensitivity and specificity of FIV PCR assay was 92% and 99%. These results will facilitate inexpensive screening for FIV in jurisdictions where FIV vaccination is practiced.