

PRACTICE PROFILE

Pride Veterinary Centre,  
Riverside Road,  
Derby DE24 8HX.

Premises: 44,000 sq ft.

Appointment time first  
opinion: 10 minutes.

Appointment time referral:  
30-45 minutes.

Consult referral: £110 + VAT.

Consult first opinion:  
£27 + VAT.

Average transaction fee:  
£64 (takes into account both  
first opinion and referral  
transactions).

"BIG BOX" VETERINARY hospitals are a fairly new phenomenon, but as a benchmark example of larger clinics, Pride Veterinary Centre in Derby, opened in August 2011, is packed with unique features that simply shout ambition. Located close to its partner, the University of Nottingham's School of Veterinary Medicine and Science, it has design quality writ large all over. Pride is the result of intense consultation between the Scarsdale group practice and the veterinary school on a joint venture, providing a teaching facility where students can learn the first opinion trade, academic specialists pick up a referral caseload and Scarsdale clinicians prosper in modern, sophisticated surroundings. Pride operates as a central

# The Pride and the passion

● Not just a practice, but a hospital and pet resort too, the Pride Veterinary Centre consequently appeals to a wide spectrum of people and generates plenty of interest. Thinking outside the veterinary 'comfort zone' has clearly paid off.



hospital hub to five small animal branches in the Derby suburbs and one in Buxton, plus a separate large animal and equine site. Effectively, it is a university teaching hospital for the next 50 years, small animal partner John Turkington tells me, as we stand in the grand entrance shared by first opinion, retail and referral.

"The notion of Pride was the practice saying it was proud of what it had to offer," he says. Differentiated from the other Scarsdale sites in fundamental design aspects, it incorporates a

pet hotel, rehabilitation centre and grooming service. During planning, the group considered having two centres, but instead opted for one large site so as to keep first opinion and referral services under one roof. Each discipline has its own reception and waiting area along with its own bespoke colour scheme.

## Consultations

VBJ joined equine partner, Wendy Furness, for a tour of the nearby consult rooms. There are five first opinion and four referral consults,

each with a workstation running AT Veterinary Systems management software and a digital display with imaging capability to show pet owners their pet's x-rays, CT scans or endoscope results. "It gets them involved in case management," explains John. A nurse consult room is available and, next to it, a quiet room for people perhaps coping with animal bereavement. Dotted around the practice's labyrinthine corridors are workstations and temperature-controlled supply areas. Should they need reminding, and that's clearly doubtful, there are plaques positioned at regular intervals reminding staff about the practice's mission statement. Directional signage is highly visible throughout, something that is essential in a building covering some 44,000 square feet. Pride is using only 75 per cent to 80 per cent of the space and there is plenty





Consultations



The consultations entrance and a consult room (centre). Right: the pharmacy.

left to expand into, according to John. A customer service manager room sits to the rear of both receptions, near a separate call centre and a stock-controlled dispensary with a dedicated pharmacist. All corridors have energy-efficient lighting controlled by sensors.

As staff bustle past, Wendy explains about the significant recruitment drive to populate the building – everyone from referral and imaging specialists to receptionists

and cleaners. "It was a huge period of change because we had a new building and people who required training on what we did as a practice," she says. "It made us ferocious about planning everything. The marketing materials had print deadlines and the opening was planned a long time in advance. We did not have an open day as such, more like an open week to spread it out, and we became much more efficient than we thought possible." Scarsdale's original staffers could be forgiven for being overawed, but both John and Wendy say all have risen to the occasion. "Their dedication is amazing to see," says John. "They have taken the whole thing on-board and really stepped up to the mark. It is a totally different experience now in terms of the way they act and talk and present themselves." A steep initial learning curve is now levelling out, though the client experience was carefully managed from the start. "We were conscious

that we wanted them to have a soft image of the practice, because I imagine something this size just looks like a big scary hospital," says Wendy. "They see the practice, but they also see the retail area and the resort. It is fairly contained."

Pride is a far cry from the practice John joined when he was seduced by regular trips around the nearby Peak District to see clients. "I loved it," he says, reminiscing. "It has just built from there." Planning on this out-of-



A Geiger counter outside the radio iodine room.

town industrial estate site started about three years ago. Scarsdale was looking for a suitable place for a



A large space for retail on the ground floor.

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*Pride's hospital entrance (left), preparation and anaesthesia room (centre), orthopaedic operating theatre (right) and laboratory (below right).*

referral hospital, but sites came and went, until this one near Derby County's football stadium became available. One building was already up and the owners wanted to build another, so a deal was struck. Scarsdale paid £3m to fit the building interiors and the university helped out on construction costs. Work began on the second building in September 2010 and finished in autumn the following year. The



*Dog ward (above); and the separate reception and waiting area for referrals (below).*

interiors took around seven months. Once built, the transformation happened quickly. "We got the keys at five o'clock on Friday afternoon and we were open on Monday," Wendy recalls. "Everybody joined in to make it happen: veterinary surgeons mopping floors, partners cleaning the windows. Everyone did their bit. Bare rooms were kitted out from the floor up."

Touring the wards you sense what a mammoth task this was. Each has its own kitchen and cleaning station. In the canine ward there are 10 large and 14 medium-sized cages and then another eight walk-in kennels in a separate room. Linking them is a spacious admissions and procedures room, while to the rear of the ward is an external exercise yard with separate canopied cages for dogs to exercise by themselves. An extensive feline ward houses 48 cages. There are four laundries dotted throughout the building and each is species-specific to

negate the spread of disease. Chemotherapy and radioactive iodine treatments are housed in their own areas and the air here is separated out to remove toxic by-products. Another isolation ward houses infectious cases, with its own procedure room and laundry, and a small mammals and exotics ward with four vivariums sits nearby.

**Clean air**

Leaving the first opinion practice to enter the hospital you notice that positive air pressure has been installed to keep airborne bugs out. Inside are housed an intensive care ward, a dentistry room, an endoscopy room, theatre laundry and a kit prep room housing autoclaves that also open into the sterile area to the rear. Theatres in the sterile area all have energy efficient LED lights and flat-screen displays so surgeons can call up diagnostic images. Soft tissue, ophthalmology and orthopaedics are housed in their own theatres. Back in the main



hospital-the imaging suite boasts a super quick GE DR x-ray system ("x-ray used to be the longest part of procedures, now it's the shortest," says John), an abdominal ultrasound room and, in one suite, a 16-slice CT scanner and a 1.5 tesla high field MRI scanner – together costing around £1m.

Scarsdale already taught university students on the farm and equine side of the business before the high-tech investment in Pride, but the previous small animal facility was not geared up for teaching. "Differences between academia and private practice mean finding a middle ground," says Wendy. "On all sides of the business that has been years in the planning and totally separate to planning the functionality of the building." John agrees, explaining that: "The university has helped extensively by putting a lot of people into the process. In fact they come over every day to see what is happening and to help out." Being at the centre of learning and mixing with academics has brought



the best out of Scarsdale staff, according to Pride. The vet school brand association is a positive for both clinicians and clients. "To be mixing

with people who we can learn from, and still be able to get on with our first opinion caseload, teaches us and helps us as vets," says John.



The hospital is equipped with an ultrasound facility.

Still, people questioned elements of the Pride concept and asked whether allowing vet students loose on real-life cases was the right thing to do. But, there have been no regrets. "Our clients have been amazing and really forward thinking. They are happy for students to learn and ask them what they are doing today. It is good for

all involved and it is fun," adds John. Consultation room sessions can be video recorded and there is talk about making more routine use of cameras in both consults and operations so students have access to an archive of material. "Until you are one-to-one with a client you cannot get that confidence. Here they will



**PROFILE**



Owners can check in their pets at Pride's pet resort reception (left). A waiting area (centre) and grassed area for exercising the guests (right).



get a lot of practice in those sorts of skills," he says. From a potential employer's viewpoint it is the perfect opportunity for the practice to assess students' viability as future Pride vets and monitor teaching systems to make sure they are on track. "As an employer we cannot grumble and say 'students are not as good as they used to be', when we have been part of that training," says Wendy. "We want to provide training that is useful to all veterinary practices and it is exciting to be part of that."

Students and interns are also asked to devise clinical research projects as part of their rotations and there are two on-going, centred around pain scores and diabetes, that Wendy thinks will benefit from practice data analysis and an ongoing link with the University of Nottingham's Centre for Evidence-based Veterinary Medicine. "There are large data sets in private practice containing useful information," she says. "It is

about trying to collate that into acceptable research. We can gain enormous amounts of information about what is really going on at the 'coal face' and then use it to change things."

Scarsdale sees Pride as the jump-off point for many of its future ambitions. There are medium and long-term plans in place to develop the other sites, expand the pet-focused side of the business and referrals. "Diverse income streams were part of our overall business plan," affirms John. Focusing those ambitious plans is a multi-layered marketing strategy that was in place well before the official opening. "We were organised, so there was a brief before the building began that defined our target markets," says Wendy. "Because we did it so far in advance, then the way we fit rooms together, the paint scheme and the signage even came into it."

Take a look at the website and you see the colour scheme reflecting the four composite parts of the practice – first opinion (green), hospital (red), retail (yellow) and pet resort (purple). Dog and cat hotels have named suites – imagine Ernie the cat in "Misty Glade". Occupants get report cards and individual menus.

The hydrotherapy room and grooming parlour next to the resort are both visible from the reception area "so

clients can see pets enjoy it," says Wendy. "It helps to bond clients and differentiates us in the market. We are no longer just a vet practice, we are a hospital and a pet resort. It appeals to a wider spectrum of people and generates more interest. We have had to think laterally."

Add in social media strands and email marketing and you see a composite plan. The future may be bright, but that does not mean leaving anything to chance, concludes Wendy.

"Keeping an eye on mobile technology is another area that has changed in the past six months and we try to predict how that will affect our market, looking at app development and whether it is going to be useful to us." She ponders momentarily. "I think you have to go outside of your comfort zone to seek out new information."

It says on its website: "Pride Veterinary Centre – where caring means more", – in Pride's case, that means more of just about everything.



The hydrotherapy pool and veterinarians' office.

