

***A grateful
Scholarship Winner
Report***

“You can always find hope in a dog’s eyes”
(Paws Magazine)

I took care of my blind Standard poodle for 13 years. It was not a good feeling being unable to properly diagnose and medically manage her condition. I was never taught Veterinary Ophthalmology at vet school in my country. On my own, I bought and read a number of veterinary ophthalmology books to cope with the increasing demand to properly diagnose and treat pet eye cases in my general practice. Reading textbooks alone did not produce the results I was looking for.

There are no veterinary ophthalmology specialists to consult with in the Philippines.



Instead we had to take the path of consultations with human ophthalmologists and have them do cataract surgeries on the pets. It was a temporary solution and not what our profession needed. I believed that we could get help somewhere and knew there was hope. The eyes of the dogs told me so.

The ISVO Acrivet scholarship has been that bright light in my dark and lonely path. It was an answered prayer to learn veterinary ophthalmology. For a general practitioner of many years, being accepted as an ISVO scholar took me by surprise. I felt that preference would be given to fresh graduates or awarded to someone new in practice. So when it was given to me, I did everything to prepare to leave my practice temporarily to study and learn veterinary

ophthalmology and return a better veterinarian.

‘A dream come true ... and the best experience for a veterinarian with a deep desire, and the interest to learn about treating animal eyes’ are my descriptions of being an ISVO Acrivet scholar. Nothing can be better than learning from the best.



Drs. Steve Hollingsworth, Edgardo Unson, and David Maggs

In today’s most modern veterinary teaching hospital, UC Davis, I learned the much needed basics foundation needed in ophthalmology alongside senior students. Experiencing proper mentoring by the friendliest and most knowledgeable faculty and residents indeed made a great impact on me. It wasn’t spoon feeding. It was about training me to think and to ask the “why’s”. I learned to read more to find the answers. I learned to practice proper and thorough examinations.



Drs. Lionel Sebbag, Tomo Wiggans, Brian Leonard, Ann Strom, and Peter Strom

My experience at the UC Davis Veterinary Ophthalmology Department was intense. The Problem Oriented Approach to clinical diagnosis was taught as the way to go about handling and managing cases. The teaching was very thorough and stimulating. It was hard work but truly inspiring. I would describe the mentoring and learning as “at its finest”. I saw complete dedication from the faculty, teaching and moulding their residents to be the best in the field.

I saw how they made learning such a beautiful and fun experience for the students. As a visiting foreign veterinarian, I felt part of their ophthalmology family instantly. I felt deep care and concern that they shared with me every moment.

The leadership and infectious drives of Dr David Maggs and Dr Steve Hollingsworth, shine in that department. I saw how the specialists confidently and carefully convey to worried owners the answer to their pets' condition. The environment is positive and encourages discussions and interactions. Skill and knowledge, combined with compassion was masterfully conveyed to pet owners. This is a take home for me to see that level of professionalism that I want to do in my own practice.

Being at UC Davis as an ISVO Acrivet scholar was a shot to the future and seeing veterinary medicine in a superlative level alive today! Seeing how a referral teaching hospital team communicates properly with the referring family veterinarian, and vice versa, was another big take home experience for me. Seeing how thorough the whole staff is in all their examinations, in their choice of diagnostic tools, and in the communication with the owner and referring veterinarian. These are the defining formulas that led to the many successes of the health of the pet that the TEAM approach did in the management of the most difficult cases and surgeries.



Drs. Brian Leonard, Ann Strom, Edgardo Unson, Sydney Cartiff and Mary Lassaline

Being part of the daily case discussions and rounds with senior clinicians, residents and faculty was a very important part of my learning experience too. Indeed the saying, '3 heads are better than two' is appropriate. The team approach to discuss and to come up with the best solution was indeed amazing. Satisfied owners and well managed and treated pets are daily occurrences at the UC Davis VMTH. Sending

patients back to their original family veterinarians maintains the integrity of the referral system.

It all starts with the proper knowledge on how to correctly describe the eye from outside in. Of course it made so much sense, that since our eyes are used to study the only visual organ, then the mastery of properly describing what you SEE is a must! Dr David Maggs described it so appropriately to me on my first day. "Our residents have been trained to describe the eye and all its lesions in its entirety. I can perfectly see what they are describing to me. Even if I am not there."

I learned the usage and definition of the proper terms. I learned how to describe lesions completely. I learned how to do a thorough ophthalmology examination. I learned how to discuss cases with the residents and faculty. I learned the proper ways to approach and manage cases by proper thinking and proper examinations, using the proper diagnostic tools, and doing a proper fundus exam. I learned the many current ways to approach the more common cases such as corneal ulcers, glaucoma, KCS and many others by understanding completely the pharmacology of the drug to be used and the pathophysiology of the disease.

I learned to how use the slit lamp. I have never used one. It is not the easiest diagnostic tool to learn. It takes practice. Lots of practice. The residents and faculty would allow me to examine the eye using the slit lamp after they, themselves, examined. They would guide me along the cases. I observed many surgeries. From the proper way to do an enucleation, to conjunctival flaps, to correcting entropion and ectropion, to third eyelid gland prolapse correction, to managing corneal ulcers, to using cryotherapy to remove Meibomian gland adenomas. I observed the more complicated surgeries such as cataract removal using phacoemulsification and doing lens extractions using cryotherapy. I observed corneal transplant surgery on a horse! I learned how to diagnose SARDS and how to use the ERG.

The list goes on. It was a daily treat for me. Seeing the staff masterfully examine eyes of dogs, cats, horses, eagles, owls, ducks, hedgehogs, calves. I have never thought that learning veterinary ophthalmology would be such a wonderful world and wonderful experience. I saw so much research going on. I saw research on usage of stem cells and so much research on genetics. I sat in intensive peer reviews of journals. I sat in pathology rounds. It was a totally new world of learning for me.

I saw that to be the best, you have to go

through intense training and study. I saw total dedication is the key to be a specialist.

I arrived at UC Davis nervous and insecure about my inadequate knowledge of veterinary ophthalmology. The ISVO Acrivet scholarship gave me the opportunity to get over this and gave me an insight of what I want to be. I want to be a specialist.

I want to learn. Because I want to be a better veterinarian.

I want to help eyes not to go unmanaged properly and go blind.

Thank you ISVO and Acrivet for the experience.

Thank you Dr David Maggs. You inspire me.

Thank you to the whole UC Davis Veterinary Ophthalmology Department: Dr. Steve Hollingsworth, Dr Kathy Good, Dr Ann Strom, Dr Mary Lassaline, Dr Tomo Wiggans, Dr. Lionel Sebbag, Dr, Brian Leonard, Dr Sydney Cartiff, Dr. Chris Murphy, Dr. Sara Thomasy, Dr Paul Russell, Heather and Sherry.

Continue to help and inspire others to achieve their dreams.

Salamat!

Edgardo Unson, DVM
ISVO-Acrivet Scholarship winner 2014

