



Inconvenience: A note pasted on the gates at HVKL on Feb 23 states that the facility is closed for the day and that the public should go to UPM veterinary clinic instead, which is situated about 25km away.

Pet owners peeved

Staff shortage at the Kuala Lumpur Veterinary Hospital in Cheras has resulted in unexpected closures, long waiting periods and overworked personnel. **2 & 3**

EXCLUSIVE



By VIJENTHI NAIR
vijenth@thestar.com.my

Vexing vet hospital

Lack of staff cited for frequent closures of govt-run facility

THE only government-run veterinary hospital in Kuala Lumpur is facing staff shortage.

The situation at the Kuala Lumpur Veterinary Hospital (HVKL) in Jalan Selar 4, off Jalan Cheras, is so bad that on some days, the hospital was forced to close as there were no medical staff available for duty.

The situation worsened in mid-2014 as many staff resigned or were transferred out.

A source from the hospital said they had always been understaffed and workers had to perform multiple tasks.

The source said that apart from treating animals, the staff were also required to do field work such as collect samples at farms, conduct checks at pet shops and inspect the quality of import and export goods.

"Even if one person goes on leave, the rest who are on duty are overloaded with work.

"We do ask for temporary assistance from the Veterinary Services Department (DVS) when necessary, but there is no guarantee that we will get any," said the source.

One of the "difficult" days was Feb 23 this year. Many people who brought their pets for treatment were shocked to find HVKL closed.

A notice on the closure was pasted on the gate and the public were advised to seek treatment at the UPM veterinary clinic in Serdang, which was about 25km away.

Many were caught off-guard and frustrated that a government-run



Lacking manpower: HVKL is the only government-run veterinary hospital in Kuala Lumpur.

hospital was closed on a working day which was also the first working day after the four-day Chinese New Year break.

When contacted, a HVKL staff member confirmed that they were closed on Feb 23 because many of its staff were on leave. Asked if the sudden closure was common, the staff member explained that it had happened several times before because of the same reason.

"The hospital has only 19 staff members, including veterinarians, assistants and administrative staff.

"Since the veterinarians and their assistants were absent, there is no point opening the hospital," the HVKL staff member said.

A call to DVS revealed that the veterinarians were attending a meeting at its headquarters in



Turned away: A woman who adopted this stray puppy suffering from a skin infection was unable to seek treatment on Feb 23 because the hospital was closed.



Stranded: These Bengal cats were denied deworming pills because the medication was out of stock.

►SEE NEXT PAGE



Multitasking: HVKL personnel who treats the animals are also collecting payment due to shortage of staff.

Those turned away forced to go to UPM

► FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

Putrajaya on Feb 23.

Although this incident had taken place before, many were caught off guard when they arrived at the hospital to find it closed.

One of them was Taman Ikan Emas PPP chairman R. Paripuranamraja who brought his sick kitten for treatment that day.

"This is not the first time. In February, I came to this hospital three times but only managed to get in during my third visit.

"Every time the hospital was closed, the guards would tell me to return the following day. Even the guard was not sure when the hospital would be open," he said.

Paripuranamraja's kitten was diagnosed with a nerve problem at HVKL earlier and was prescribed some medicine. However, that morning, he noticed that the kitten was having difficulty walking so he rushed to the hospital.

"I am frustrated with the service. How can a government hospital which serves the public be closed on a week day?

"There were many others with me on that day who were confused and angry.

"I work in the city and cannot travel far. I did not want to take a risk with my kitten, so I asked my wife to rush to UPM veterinary clinic immediately," he said.

A first-time visitor, who only identified herself as Rani, was among those turned away due to the hospital's closure.

"Having a pet is an expensive affair but my daughter found a puppy on the street and wanted to adopt it. It had a skin problem and I wanted to get it treated.

"I never knew that there was a

government-run veterinary hospital. I live in Selayang and made my way here on Feb 23 only to find it closed.

"I came back after a week and got the puppy treated, but the waiting time was more than an hour. The clock on their ticket dispensing machine was about 30 minutes fast.

"I came before 8.55am but the time printed on my ticket was 9.30am.

"I am happy with the treatment for my puppy but the hospital has to upgrade its services," she added.

Aznan, who brought his two cats for vaccination, was made to wait for more than an hour before the procedure.

"I could have gone to a private veterinary clinic but I had a bad experience before. My cat died a week after getting a vaccination from a private clinic. There are cases of substandard or unapproved vaccines used by private practitioners and I did not want to take the risk.

"I trust that the vaccines from the government clinics are approved so I decided to come here.

"The hospital had the vaccines but did not have the deworming pills. I was advised to buy it from a pet shop. The staff said they were waiting for allocation to buy the supply," he said.

Aznan added that he found it strange that the staff member who treated his cats was the same person at the registration counter.

"During my earlier visit, the person collecting the payment was the same one who treated my cats.

"It is obvious that they are understaffed and forced to multitask. But I cannot accept the fact that the hospital is out of medication," he said.



Frustrated: Paripuranamraja had to get his wife to rush his sick kitten to the UPM veterinary clinic on Feb 23 as HVKL was closed without notice.



Confusing: Although the registration hours were changed in December last year, the old notification board has not been removed. The current schedule was only printed on an A4 paper and pasted at the registration counter.

Meanwhile, K. Shanti, who often brought her dogs to HVKL for treatment, said its operating hours should be extended.

"I have been turned away several times because I have missed the registration hours.

"Many government agencies are extending their operating hours even after the regular working hours. After all, this is the only government-run veterinary hospital in Kuala Lumpur," she said.

The hospital operates in two sessions. The morning session is between 7.45am and 10am, while the evening session is between 2pm and 2.45pm. Both sessions are on from Monday until Wednesday, while there is only the afternoon session on Thursday and Friday. It is closed on weekends and public holidays.

When the time was up, the guard would close the gate and only allow vehicles to exit the building.

The opening hours has been reduced since Dec 24 last year.

Previously, the morning session was between 8.15am and 11am, while the afternoon session was between 2.15pm and 3.30pm.

Based on observation, there was a steady flow of people bringing in their pets from 7.45am right up to 10am. Most of the pets were treated by 11am.

HVKL director Dr Muhammad Nazri Khairuddin acknowledged that they were facing a shortage of technical personnel which was the reason for the long waiting period for treatment at the hospital.

He said the temporary closure on Feb 23 was due to insufficient staff, as some HVKL staff were on medical leave while veterinary officers had to attend a meeting in Putrajaya.

He said HVKL would soon undergo an internal reorganisation to overcome the matter.

HVKL is under the Veterinary Services Department (DVS), which comes under the Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry Ministry.