

FNU's new state-of-the-art Vet Teaching Hospital to help raise animal welfare standards in the region



Minister for Agriculture, Hon Dr Mahendra Reddy officiating at the Veterinary Hospital groundbreaking ceremony at FNU Koronivia Campus.

“A Veterinary Teaching Hospital plays an important role in providing hands-on practical experience to veterinarians of tomorrow on how to handle animals and treat them.”

Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment, Hon Dr Mahendra Reddy made these comments while officiating at the groundbreaking ceremony for the Fiji National University's (FNU) Veterinary Teaching Hospital that will be constructed at the College of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (CAFF) campus in Koronivia.

Dr Reddy thanked the University for listening to the calls from Veterinary fraternity in Fiji and the neighbouring Pacific countries by starting the Bachelor of Veterinary Science and Animal Husbandry programme in 2014 which then led to the idea of constructing the landmark Veterinary Teaching Hospital.

The 30 million dollar hospital project will be fully funded by the Fiji government, with grants released in different stages.

“Animal welfare is now becoming a critical issue and our countries cannot afford to send students to universities in Australia and New Zealand as even these countries have limited space and not all universities offer this programme due to high cost of delivery,” said Dr Reddy.

“Veterinary students from all six years of the curriculum will learn through active engagement in the care for animal patients. They will be exposed to a range of clinical and medical problems on an ongoing basis that is found actually on the field.”

Dr Reddy said the Veterinary hospital will also be of great help to upgrade and provide regular upskilling to Fiji's para vets which will be a cost effective way of providing veterinary service to farmers in the Agriculture Ministry that is spread throughout the country.

“Our Animal Health and Husbandry extension officers can be upskilled and multitasked to handle basic veterinary works if they go through short internships programs at the Teaching Hospital.”

The Hon Minister reiterated that it was not an easy task to establish a teaching hospital as such.

“It's easy to construct a building. But we need the right equipment and specialists, interns, experts in fields from anesthesia to specialized medicines.” Dr Reddy has called upon development partners to support the hospital in picking up core budget funding and Pacific Island Countries to assist the hospital by sending their students to FNU rather than outside universities as practical exposure at this hospital will deal with similar cases in the other small island states which will not be found in overseas universities.

FNU Vice Chancellor, Professor Nigel Healey said the new animal hospital and laboratory complex will be the first of its kind in the Pacific and it will allow the students to do their clinical practice on campus.

Professor Healey said the hospital will give the country's registered vets a place to work with the students to raise the standard of veterinary science in Fiji.

“It will be a facility that will signal to the Pacific that Fiji is ready to lead the region in the development of the livestock industry and the raising of standards of animal welfare,” said VC Healey.

“Fiji sends its future veterinarians to Australia and New Zealand at great financial cost to be educated. Many came back to Fiji only to serve out their bonds and then returned to the country of their alma mater to lucrative careers.”

“Fiji relied on expatriate vets, often volunteers who came for work experience. The result was a chronic shortage of trained vets, which held back the development of Fiji's livestock sector.”

Prof Healey acknowledged the support of the stakeholders who have so far assisted in the smooth delivery of Bachelor of Veterinary Science and Animal Husbandry programme.

“We are grateful for the support of Massey University and James Cook University, whose experts reviewed our curriculum in 2017 and helped us strengthen the practical components.”

“We thank the Fiji Veterinary Association (FVA), which was instrumental in establishing the Bachelor of Veterinary Science and Animal Husbandry, and who have guided the CAFF's programmes development in the last three years.”

“The University acknowledges Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), the SPC and the other vets' practices that have worked with us to provide our veterinary students with clinical attachments. And we are grateful to the Ministry of Agriculture for helping us develop a pathway to vet registration for the upcoming graduates,” said Professor Healey.

Currently, a total of 140 students are enrolled in the Bachelor of Veterinary Science and Animal Husbandry programme and 11 students will be graduating in December 2019.



FNU Veterinary Teaching Hospital design.