

# CANINE CORNER

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## Dedicated animal MRI

Veterinary diagnostics in Christchurch have taken a huge leap forward with the installation of a dedicated animal MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) facility operated by the Pacific Radiology Group. The facility is located directly behind veterinary practice McMaster & Heap, which has a preferential agreement with the Group to help sedate animals on-site when a referring veterinarian is unable to accompany an animal to the facility. It is New Zealand's first and only dedicated animal MRI clinic.

The MRI is the brainchild of Pacific Radiology's Project Lead, Gareth Leeper.

"I am looking forward to being able to scan animals at a more sensible time of the day", says Gareth.

Until now, animals were scanned well into the late hours of the night after human patient work had been completed.

"Animal imaging is more complex than human imaging because animal bodies are smaller with finer and smaller anatomy. This requires the MRI to take more detailed slices/images than we would do for a human and this takes longer to get the job done. The new facility will enable up to five dogs to be scanned every day."

I asked Gareth to explain the use of MRI in layman's terms — why would you MRI instead of another imaging option?

"An x-ray shines a bright light at the body and denser tissues will stop the light, whereas softer tissues will create a shadow. So the x-ray is great for structural diagnoses such as fractures, but



Arni.

leaves the veterinarian to interpret the shadows.

"With MRI, we introduce energy and then listen carefully as the excited atoms return to normal. What results is a three-dimensional picture at the molecular level with intense resolution. We have a very good contrast among all types of soft tissues including muscles, tendons, ligaments, discs, spinal cord tissue, nerves, tumours and other growths.

"MRI takes away the need for assumptions and gives you the detail."



Dog in MRI scanner, courtesy of Pacific Radiology

### How MRI helped Arni

French Bulldog Arni had an MRI scan in 2021 after he jumped from his family's four-wheel drive, suffering a spinal injury that resulted in paralysis. An MRI was done with urgency resulting in the recommendation for spinal decompression surgery. Within four days, Arni had his surgery followed by approximately four months of physical therapy.

Arni recovered, only to hurt himself again in early 2022. An active dog, he suffered another spinal injury in a different location. This time, MRI revealed that Arni's injury was not as severe. Owners Duncan and Nataliya decided against surgery for a second time; Arni recovered with drug therapy and a period of restricted exercise. Nataliya adds that she was very grateful that the couple had chosen to take out pet insurance for Arni. She notes "pet insurance is especially important for French Bulldogs because spinal problems seem to be common".

Veterinary care, including scans such as x-rays and MRI, is not subsidised by our government the way human healthcare is. Any experienced dog owner knows that the costs for care, particularly when there is a grave diagnosis or an acute injury, can be prohibitive.

Pet insurance is one option for dog owners, as is a committed savings program to ensure money is available should the worse happen. 🐾