

compassion

a newsletter of american fondouk



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What a Year!

A personal word from the Director

Dear Friend,

Exactly one year to the day after Covid's arrival in Morocco, I couldn't help but look back in amazement.

The frontiers closed with a bang that day. Police seemed to come out of the woodwork in numbers, setting up roadblocks every 300 yards and fiercely enforcing the nation's airtight lockdown.

I confess, we at the Fondouk were bewildered and scared.

Within a day, the government gave us permission to remain open — a testament to how important working animals are to Morocco's economy. But it was a struggle. Owners called us continuously, begging us to find a way to get their sick or injured animals into our care, in spite of the extreme ban on movement. Sometimes we managed to retrieve sick animals by driving our ambulance along railroad tracks, staying off the roads. It was a harrowing time.

But now, one year on, I can write with pride about my host country's achievements in the fight against



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COVID-19. Remarkably, this country has already vaccinated roughly 16% of the population (including me). It is astonishing that Morocco, one of the world's poorest countries, has vaccinated more people than the entire rest of Africa together.



As I write, we are all still here at the Fondouk — all well — and still providing lifesaving care to animals from all over Morocco.

My heartfelt thanks to everyone who has given so graciously

and generously this year. You've made possible what seemed impossible: health in the face of a global pandemic, life in the face of death. And for owners: relief, even joy, in the face of agony.

—Dr. Gigi Kay, Director

A Day in the Life of the Fondouk

One Day With Dr. Fazy

Most people start their working day at 7 or 8 a.m., maybe even 9. At the Fondouk, the workday starts at 1 minute past midnight — and goes “full speed ahead” for the next 24 hours.

If animals are in pain or critically ill, they usually need us there throughout the night. Our night team — one vet, one intern, and one student — work all night.

Tonight’s workload: two colics (hourly treatments); a paralyzed donkey; a newborn foal, orphaned (needs milk every two hours). Quite a busy night!



The rest of the veterinary team joins the night team for rounds at 7:30. Every one of our 50 or so hospitalized animals has already been examined by an intern or a student at 7 a.m., its progress discussed during the round. Today’s report: One of the colics is still in a lot of pain. The other, after receiving fluids and paraffin oil all night via a tube into the stomach, finally passed a meter-long mass of plastic bag and rope (a common problem, as animals graze wherever their owners find grass) — and looks remarkably well this morning!

The paralyzed donkey, sorry to say, can’t be helped. We call Hussain, his owner — who arrives quickly,

but on his neighbor’s back, unable to walk unassisted. His donkey has been his wheelchair, his only means of mobility, “more like a brother than a donkey,” Hussain says sadly. Now, the donkey, like his friend Hussain, can’t walk either.

Yet Hussain’s story turns a corner. Just as we’re discussing the unfortunate situation with him, a visitor walks in. It seems impossible, but he represents a group from New York who visited the Fondouk in the tourist-friendly days before the pandemic. He holds out an envelope, containing a contribution: *the exact price of a new donkey*. Tomorrow, Dr. Gigi will go to the local market and buy a new donkey for Hussain!

But no pause for celebration. Now it’s time for tending to outpatients:

- A donkey brought in by rubbish collectors, unable to bear weight on his hind leg.
- A mule from 30 kilometers away with a severely infected knee.
- A young mule due for castration.
- A baby donkey, here for three weeks with a horrific dog-bite wound to his rump, is just now picked up by his grateful owner.
- The mule who had surgery for a large tumor 10 days ago. Ready to go home!
- A skinny middle-aged donkey, esophagus blocked, unable to eat or drink for the past five days — but also heavily pregnant — immediate action required. (Two of our veterinarians sedate the animal and begin the exhausting hours-long process: pour warm water down a tube to the blockage, siphon it off, repeat. But finally: success!)

Once rounds conclude, the senior clinician on the inpatient team assigns tasks, and we begin attending to our long list of inpatients.

The morning flashes by in a whirl of patients assessed for lameness, wounds, colic, painful eyes, breathing difficulties, weight loss

— and happily, some patients presented simply for routine health and dental checks.

To finish the morning, our students and veterinary interns gather for a 30-minute lecture. Today's topic: how to determine a horse's age by its teeth. Education is essential to our mission, with day courses for owners; weekend courses for local farriers, or hoof-trimmers; occasional seminars for local veterinarians; and more.

By midmorning, the hospital yard is a riot of new arrivals, but the outpatient team deftly triages each one. By lunchtime, they've treated and discharged the simpler cases, and admitted those in need of more investigation and/or treatment.

Afternoons are dedicated to performing any elective surgery and continuing investigations and treatments for the list of inpatients.

And the next day, it all begins again!

Thanks to all our friends who give so generously to keep all of this critically important work going strong!



Fondouk *Q & A*

Q. How did the Fondouk function during the initial pandemic lockdown?

A. Emergency-only as of June last year, with 2 veterinarians on site for emergency cases that managed to get past police patrols. During this initial 6-week period, we also gave food, flour, and oil to mule owners — nearly 100 of them — every 2 weeks.

Q. What's the past year been like?

A. Full capacity, fully staffed, very busy! Maximum health precautions — masks, hand sterilization, daily staff temperature checks, routine testing, owners kept outside. A few COVID-19 cases with staff, but no hospitalizations required.

Q. What's the status of the New Stables Project?

A. Essentially finished! We're cleaning the site, planting a few plants, digging the well. By the time you read this, we'll have electricity, and the manuals will be on site for use.

Q. What are the most pressing challenges today?

A. Our electricity went out after heavy rains, and we had to replace one vehicle. Our X-ray developing system was obsolete; we had no choice but to purchase a new one — at a cost of \$30,000. So finances are a real pressure point. But the imaging room needs a new roof. (The current roof, dating from 1950, leaks badly — which puts X-rays at risk!) Cost: \$10,000.



Welcome, Dr. Justine!

A new face in leadership



We're grateful to welcome **Dr. Justine Kane-Smyth** to leadership of the American Fondouk when Dr. Gigi Kay needs to be away.

Hailing from Ireland, Justine has several years of general equine practice as well as additional years serving as a specialist equine surgeon (with a residency in Edinburgh, at a veterinary school we're closely associated with, having trained many of their students).

Justine has also volunteered with us in the past. Her first visit, in September 2019, "left a very lasting impression indeed," she says. "The team achieve the most incredible feats in helping animals in their care — that is certain! This is what drew me back to the American Fondouk: it was such a privilege to be a small part of something amazing."

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But what made the deepest impression on her, she reports, was "the strength and importance of the profoundly deep human-animal bond" between owners and animals that our team so diligently safeguards.

One recent example: a "really sweet bay mare" with an acutely painful eye — a desmetocoele, or extremely deep corneal ulcer with a very high risk of rupture which would lead to loss of vision, severe pain, and inevitably removal of the eye. Fortunately, the mare arrived in time. "The eye was still intact, and there was an opportunity to save it if we acted quickly," Justine recalls. She and one of our senior clinicians

successfully performed the delicate surgery.

But Justine was most impressed by the mare's owner, who visited the hospital every day over the next two weeks. "Devotion to one's pets is of course not unusual," she says, "but the bond here is different: Here is an owner who spends every hour of his working day (which is the large majority of his waking day) in the company of his mare. But they are not just work buddies: He relies on her to make a living, to provide for his family."

The mare's vision was restored. "Her owner's joy on arriving to collect her was clear even to me looking on. His was a mixture of relief that his mare's eye was saved, relief that he could once again earn a living — but also just plain happiness that his mare, his partner, was returning home!"

Justine headed home from her initial month as a volunteer "feeling so incredibly humbled, not just by the experience, but overwhelmingly by the people. The American Fondouk team are a sensation, achieving a *tour de force* day in, day out."

And friends like you, giving generously, set it all in motion. Thank you, Justine, for joining forces with us ... and thanks to all who give!



Providing Charitable Veterinary Care
in Morocco Since 1927™

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The working animals in Fez, Medina will always need our help. We've been helping them, with the support of friends like you, since 1927. If you would like more information about including the American Fondouk in your estate plan, please contact Raffaella Torchia at 617 541.5011.