



Angelique Allen
Pet Audit & Compliance Manager
Pets at Home

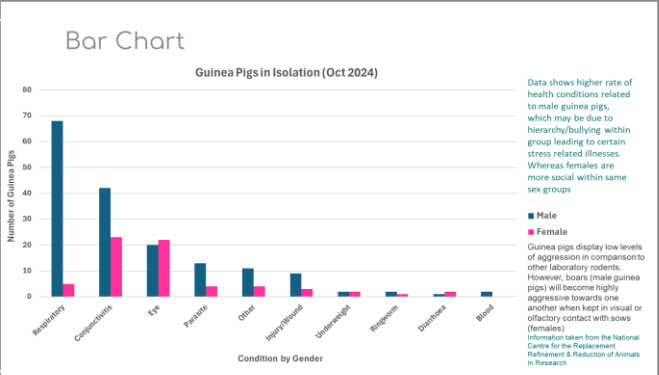
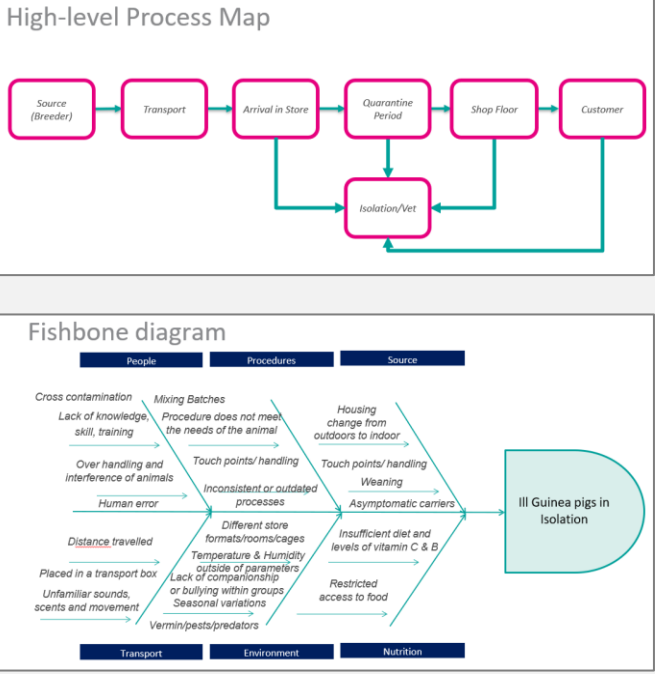
BACKGROUND

The most common pet in isolation is guinea pigs. Reasons for isolating include respiratory, conjunctivitis, eye issues, injury, fight wounds, weight loss and parasites. Yet these issues are scarce at source.

Stress can compromise a guinea pig's immune system, making them more susceptible to illness, parasites and skin problems. Depending on the treatment used they could be in isolation from anywhere from 5 days up to 4 weeks. Therefore, care and treatment impacts on colleague time and involves extra handling which can exacerbate the stress for the guinea pigs.

47% of the pets in isolation in our stores are guinea pigs with acquired stress related illness. Animals are distressed and colleagues upset. Their care and treatment costs time and money.

DIAGNOSTICS



Outdoor guinea pigs at a breeder

AIM

By the 6th of March 2025, reduction of guinea pigs in isolation based on initial 20-week baseline data

MEASUREMENT DEFINITION

- Number of guinea pigs in isolation for a single store
- Number of guinea pigs in isolation from two stores on the same delivery day.
- Time frame from arrival to movement to isolation i.e. number of days before issue arose and guinea pig isolated.
- Location moved from i.e. Quiet Room or Shop Floor.
- Reason for isolation i.e. what illness/issue arose and how many cases.

Chosen location: Mansfield Pets at Home Time of day 9.03am

Overseeing a pet delivery at Mansfield Store. Quiet Room is located at the rear of the store next to the fire exit door and warehouse shutters.

On arrival colleague was preparing the cages ready for delivery. The guinea pig cages were set up with a cardboard hide, plenty of hay and food in bowls was added and placed near the hide box. After cages set-up the room was brushed and swept and therefore room is clean and tidy. One guinea pig cage was on the lower shelf (pink) and one guinea pig cage in the middle level (navy blue).

Chosen location: Mansfield Pets at Home Time of day 9.03am

Upon arrival of the pet delivery, the pets (8 rats, 4 gerbils, 4 Russian hamsters and 12 guinea pigs) were quickly placed into the cages. Guinea pigs split into two groups of 6. Guinea pigs instantly went and hid either in the hide or under the hay. Room felt cold and colleague then went to fetch water bottles for the cages and greens for the guinea pigs. Greens were placed in front of the hide. The only noise in the room was the hum of the air con which it felt like it was blowing out cold air. Other noises were from the animals such as the newly arrived gerbils that were busy exploring their cage, the Russian hamsters too were active and exploring. Rats and guinea pigs were hiding away, although after 10 mins the rats started to come out and explore new environment. Noises from the animals was scratching, digging, squabbling from Russian hamsters, sniffing from rats. At no point in the 30 mins of observation did the guinea pigs attempt to come out of their hiding areas, saw slight movement in the hay. Left the room to observe through the window in case it was because of my presence and saw no movement. Switched off the lights for a couple of minutes and did hear movement from the guinea pig enclosures but they did not come out to eat or drink.

CHANGE IDEAS

- Bowls in Q room and on shop floor as opposed to scatter/piled feeding as guinea pigs are accustomed to food in a bowl or hopper at the breeders.
- Greens/Veg on arrival
- Vitamin C supplement
- Vitamin B supplement
- Vitamin B & C supplement
- Longer Q period (5 days instead of 3)
- Extra Shelters
- Towel over one side of cage for Q or Iso cage
- Radio in room (to get adjusted to noise)
- Reduced stocking density for male guinea pigs
- Reduced stocking density for female guinea pigs
- Supplement with Redi-grass
- Guinea pig cages kept off the floor of Q and Iso Rooms
- Room light switched off for first 2 hours of arrival.



Guinea pigs provided with fresh grass and fed from bowls at breeder

PDSA cycles

PDSA Test #	PLAN	DO	STUDY	ACT
1.1	Food and water close to hide area	Include as part of pet delivery procedure	Enables those guinea pigs that are nervous to have easy access to food and water, therefore prevents the risk of dehydration and losing weight to protect overall health	Adopt but need to Adapt for use on shop floor.
1.2	Greens placed close to hide (greens provided twice daily)	Included as part of pet delivery procedure	Helps the guinea pigs nutritionally and enables them to settle as eating greens promotes normal behaviour and provides vitamin C which helps bolster immunity.	Adopt/Adapt - considerations for a better choice of veg such as peppers and broccoli which have a higher vitamin C content.
2.1	Lights off upon arrival of guinea pigs into Q room - Time length 1 hour.	Lights off on arrival.	Evident guinea pigs need lights off for longer as some guinea pigs took over an hour before they started to explore cage.	Adapt - Extend lights off on day of delivery to allow guinea pigs plenty of time to settle, reduce stress and exhibit normal behaviour.
2.2	Lights kept off until 4pm. Light on at 4pm as it coincides with picnic time and pm welfare checks.	Updated poster and briefed management team.	With guinea pigs preferring twilight periods as the longer period of darkness helps them settle better on the first day of arrival.	Adapt but need to include other actions for when lights are on in Q room i.e. placement of food and water.
3.1	Produce/update pet delivery procedure	Procedure poster created and relayed to team.	Poster displayed on Q room door as a reminder and guide of process. Colleagues found having poster on display helped them ensure actions were completed	Adopt and will be submitting for approval and implementation across all PCC's.
4.1	After Q period guinea pigs moved to shop floor late evening to allow guinea pigs to adjust to shop floor at a quieter period of the day and twilight preference.	Change to current process as there is no specific time set.	Waiting to test and observe.	

Change idea

Switching lights off for in quarantine room upon arrival of pets into quarantine room

Do

Created a Pet Delivery Procedure and briefed team at Mansfield. Poster on the Q door as a reminder and quick reference. Oversaw a pet delivery and gave guidance to colleague.

Study

Oversaw a pet delivery. 12 male guinea pigs delivered, split into 3 cages of 4. Guinea pigs delivered at 10.12am. At 10.56 heard movement and eating of cabbage for Q34 cage although that stopped once the air con system started. No movement seen from the other 2 cages (Q8 & Q35).

11.15am movement from Q38 and 4 guinea pigs are showing interest in greens and exploring cage. A colleague went out the back door at 11.20 which is near the q room and guinea pigs in Q38 froze still for a moment and then carried on eating and exploring. Still no movement from the other 2 cages. 11.24 movement from Q8 only one guinea pig seen to start. 2nd guinea pig appeared at 11.26, both guinea pigs exploring cage and starting to eat hay and greens. 3rd guinea pig appears a minute later. 12.31 3rd (Q35) cage now seeing movement, two guinea pigs exploring. Q8 exhibiting normal behaviour by grooming. Popping behaviour seen with one guinea pig in Q8 11.50am. All guinea pigs now exploring cage. 12.01pm noise from warehouse audible in Q room although guinea pigs not attempting to hide or freeze. 12.04pm Q8 guinea pig drinking from water bottle. 12.12pm - Two hours after arrival switched on lights. Noted a few of the guinea pigs froze and slowly retreated to the cardboard hide. Its evident the guinea pigs need a longer time frame in order to adjust to the new environment.

Act

Abandon ☐

Again ☐

Adapt ☒

Adopt ☐

Extend ☐

Next steps..... Adapt

Did a test of seeing reaction upon light going on and guinea pigs either froze position or slowly retreated to hide. When entering the room, the guinea pigs quickly retreated to the hide. Therefore, considerations for keeping the lights off for a longer period as the timeframe for exhibiting normal behaviour varies dependant on the group and its evident the guinea pigs feel more comfortable in a dark room. Lights would need to be switched on later that day (4pm) as they need to get adjusted to the lighting that would be replicated on shop floor. Therefore, other PDSA's such as water bottle and food close to hide will come into play.

Need to use a better camera as video was a bit pixelated.

Pet Delivery Procedure

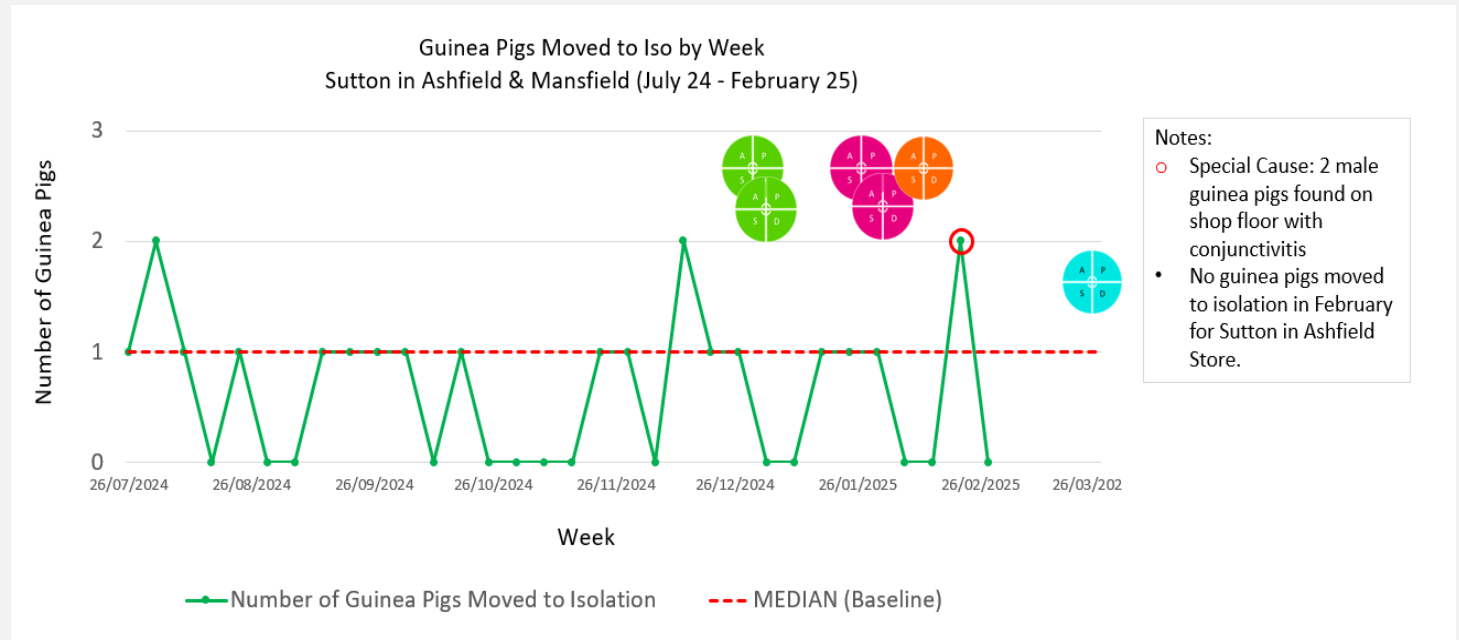
Transportation and changes in environment can cause stress that impacts on the health and welfare of our pets.

Take these steps to minimise stress for our newly delivered pets

- Set-up cages ready for the pet delivery
- Place the pets in their cages promptly on arrival
- Note the sexes in the Q logs (written on the front of the transport box) and amount received
- Give each pet the right amount of food and water
- Place food in food bowls close to hide
- Position water bottle close to hide with spout at right height for each type of animal
- Place 4-5 spring green leaves in cage for the guinea pigs
- When all the pets are in their cages with food, water and enrichment SWITCH OFF the Q room light to allow them to settle.
- SWITCH lights back on at 4pm

Procedure Poster

RUN CHART



CONCLUSIONS

My learnings are that guinea pigs are an extremely sensitive species that are neophobic and don't cope well with change. Stress has a direct impact on their health and there are many actions that need to change to help reduce stress for our guinea pigs. Its evident that from the data that whilst the new process worked to reduce stress for the resting period (Q period), it did not however prevent issues occurring when moved to shop floor pens. Therefore, its important to ensure continuity in both areas. Also, Mansfield and Sutton have completely different shop floor formats, so may have influenced the difference in results for both. There are also the steps prior to arrival and post sale that need adjustments to ensure a positive result across the board. Some steps are simple to implement however others will require extra resource and time. Next steps will be to observe the processes for shop floor and conduct further PDSA's and then follow suit for the processes prior to delivery.

REFLECTIONS & LEARNING

To achieve my aim, I need to revisit each of the fish bone points and identify specific areas where further actions can be implemented and therefore make a holistic improvement as opposed just one part. That standing back from the situation and simply observing can provide the greatest insight. The process may take longer than desired due to available resources, costs and time constraints, however if it achieves the ultimate goal for the animal and improves its health and wellbeing, then its something that needs to be factored in and requires patience and determination. I also acknowledge that I need to involve more stakeholders both internal and external.

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