

PET CARE / STOCKHOLM

Taking the lead on paw health

Porky pug? Critical-care corgi? Sweden's AniCura is the mega vet that wants to help.

WRITER Maddy Savage PHOTOGRAPHER Clément Morin

Some of the more relaxed companies out there allow staff to bring their pets to work; at AniCura it's almost mandatory. In its Stockholm offices puppies laze on desks and nap in meeting rooms. Yet despite the fluffy atmosphere, this is a serious business. Since setting up in 2011 – after a merger between a non-profit animal foundation and two privately owned hospitals – AniCura has become one of the world's biggest animal hospital groups. Today the group owns 180 clinics and has expanded across the Nordics and into Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Austria, in the process becoming one of Sweden's most surprising exports.

AniCura CEO Peter Dahlberg gets an affectionate lick from five-month-old Jack, a Yorkshire-terrier-powderpuff cross. When it comes to pet care, he says, it helps to be a brand from Sweden, a country with some of the strongest animal-welfare laws in the world. "Swedes have a long history of being close to nature and treating animals well," he says. "And pets have become more and more



valued; they are now almost completely equivalent to any other family member."

AniCura has used this trend to its advantage but as people spend more money on the health of their pets there has also been a focus on specialised care. Its clinic in Jönköping, in southern Sweden, recently hit the headlines for its health programmes for obese pets, plus the group continues to fund research projects across Europe, including studies on animal epilepsy, heart disease and genetic sequencing. Its clinic in Danderyd, northern Stockholm, boasts hi-tech equipment, from MRI scanners to echocardiogram machines.

AniCura's corporate structure has also been key to its phenomenal growth. Ownership is divided between a vast number of staff, an animal-welfare foundation, private-equity firm Nordic Capital and Swedish investment firm Fidelio Capital. "There's not much hierarchy and a big emphasis on teamwork; whether you're the receptionist or the head vet, you should be able to have an influence," says Dahlberg, who was head-hunted to lead the company in 2011 after a corporate career that included running an e-commerce venture buying and selling pet products.

Dahlberg says that his background has helped foster a culture in which vets are able to make decisions on the ground. "We've had a guiding principle from the start that if a vet needs to refer the patient to another vet, it doesn't matter if it's in AniCura, to an external party or to our biggest competitor," he says. "That contrasts to some other groups, both in veterinary and human care,



where they try to steer things much harder, which I just think is wrong."

It is perhaps no coincidence that AniCura is the only veterinary group in the world to publish an annual report on the quality of its medical care, a move that Dahlberg is keen for other companies to follow. "Quality improvement is not about nice words, it's about long-term hard work and the commitment of employees," he says, hinting that corporate marketing may be masking the reality at some of AniCura's rivals.

Across the courtyard from Dahlberg's office, Claire Nichol is checking a drip attached to a terrier called Tingaling. It's the end of a varied day at the clinic: the emergency specialist has also treated a septic abdomen, a hormonal disorder and a broken neck. She says that since joining 10 years ago, improvements in education and equipment have meant that the group's animal hospitals can now "provide a higher level of care", making AniCura a tempting career option for ambitious practitioners. "There aren't many clinics in Sweden that have the same drive to invest in critical-care medicine."



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More leading companies in pet care:

1. **Evidensia**
Set up in 2012, Stockholm-based Evidensia now owns more than 180 clinics and hospitals, and recently merged with UK-based ivc. As its name suggests, Evidensia has a reputation for evidence-based care.
2. **CVS**
This group, based in Norfolk in eastern England, has more than 400 clinics and 1,000 vets in the UK and the Netherlands. It also has seven pet crematoria as well as laboratories performing diagnostics services for vets. Asset-management firm BlackRock and Standard Life Investments are among the company's largest shareholders.
3. **Banfield**
With more than 975 clinics in the US and Puerto Rico, Banfield started as a small practice in Oregon launched by vet Warren J Wegert in 1955. It grew rapidly in the 1990s after major investment from PetSmart, the largest speciality pet retailer in North America.



Clockwise from top: Peter Dahlberg with Jack and Zorro; veterinary nurses at AniCura's headquarters in Danderyd, north Stockholm; Ruskiy toy terrier Tingaling; AniCura's clinic in Danderyd; an AniCura accountant's 10-week-old puppy, Yoshi, naps on a desk



AVIATION / JAPAN

Remote control

A membership-only private-plane service takes off, with high hopes to go global.

On a sunny day in August, a Kodiak 100 turboprop aeroplane takes off into the sky above Tokyo. It's a small aircraft often used on humanitarian missions but today the livery doesn't feature a UNHCR stamp; instead, emblazoned on the beige fuselage are the words "Sky Trek".

While the West has seen a crop of start-up private-plane services appear in recent years – from Surf Air to JetSmarter and JetSuiteX – Sky Trek is Japan's first membership-only

small-aircrafts charter service – and it's going places. Since its founding in 2016 the company has launched in Hawaii, connecting Honolulu with five destinations, and it is about to hit the Philippines. "Our plan is to build a global membership and network," says company president Keita Nagahori.

The firm behind Sky Trek is Setouchi Holdings, a vast conglomerate based in the small Hiroshima town of Onomichi. In 2015 the group bought the Idaho-based plane manufacturer Quest Aircraft, known for its short take-off and landing Kodiak 100. Now, whether its clients are travelling for business or pleasure, Sky Trek takes care of the entire process, from sending a Lexus (or helicopter) for pick-up at one of Tokyo's airports to flying to the final destination in the Kodiak 100.

A business account has a sign-up fee of ¥15m (€116,000) and an annual membership of ¥1.08m (€8,500); a private account costs ¥10m (€78,000), with ¥480,000 (€3,750) a year thereafter. Pricy, but Sky Trek has attracted Japanese companies with bureaux all over the country, as well as those who want convenient flights for business trips, client entertainment and weekend holidays. "You don't need to queue at airport security," says Nagahori. "And you don't wait; our plane waits for you."

Japan is well suited to such a service. "It is an island nation. There are so many remote places and islands, and we want to connect them by plane," says Nagahori. "We have state-of-the-art aircraft and they only need a 300-metre runway to take-off and land. A Boeing 777 would have no chance." Junichi Toyofuku

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