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Jumpers, jumpers and more jumpers

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ABSTRACT: This is a 1000-word article about an appeal for knitted squares started by me at the Animal Health Trust, to use to make jumpers to help avoid hypothermia in MRI patients.

The appeal had an overwhelming and unexpected response and seemed to capture the imagination of hundreds of knitters. The story includes templates and instructions that can be used by other practices to make dog and cat jumpers, as well as descriptions of some of the responses the appeal brought. There are accompanying photographs of several dogs wearing the jumpers.

So it all started with our little patients in the magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scanner ...

I work as an anaesthesia nurse at the Animal Health Trust (AHT). Shortly after starting work here, a discussion came up among the anaesthetists about knitted jumpers to avoid hypothermia in our MRI patients. The nature of MRI limits the forms of heating we can take into the MRI scanner. The strong magnetic field will cause any ferromagnetic object to become flying, and potentially lethal, projectiles inside an MR suite (Gavin & Bagley, 2009, p. 21). Clearly, our electric hot-air blankets cannot be taken into the scanner and it had been found by us that knitted jumpers were very helpful in preventing heat loss.

Hypothermia in our patients can have serious consequences including impaired blood coagulation, increased blood loss during surgery and reduced immune system function, which can increase the risk of post-operative wound infections. Post-operative shivering can increase oxygen consumption and this may result in hypoxaemia (Mosing, 2016, p. 17).

Some kind people had knitted some jumpers for us, but many had disappeared over the years. Also, we had a need for long-backed jumpers, for the many, many dachshunds that we scan for spinal problems.

I'm an obsessive knitter, so of course I became involved. My previous knitting projects have included the conventional scarves, jumpers (for humans), baby blankets, clothes and toys.

Knitting is in the blood. My mother and both my grandmothers knitted. And in the next generation, my beautiful niece even designed and knitted her own wedding dress (**Figure 1**).

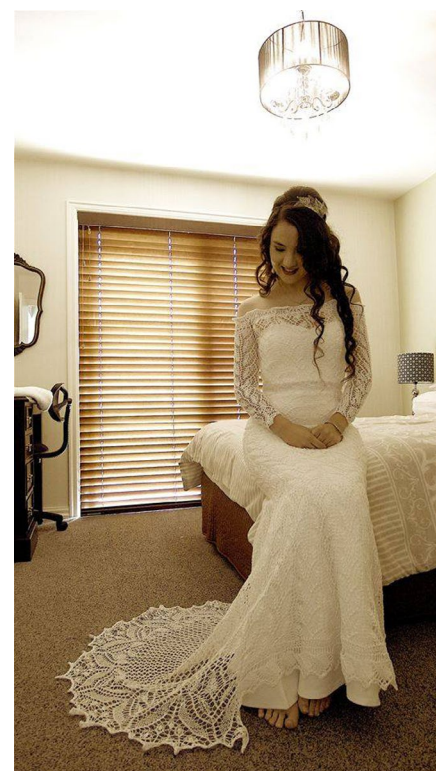


Figure 1. Wedding dress designed and knitted by author's niece



Figure 2. First design, modelled by Alma

So designing a jumper for a long-backed dog wasn't too difficult. Here's one of my first designs, modelled by Alma, not a patient, but a colleague's dog (Figure 2).

Keeping them from disappearing was rather more tricky, and making them in the variety of sizes and shapes we needed was also a problem.

And so was born the idea of knitting squares and stitching them into a variety of sizes. I thought this technique would have the added advantage that I could use up oddments of wool to make the jumpers. Anyone who knits as much as I do will understand that I spend my life wading through hundreds of nearly empty balls of yarn.

I set to work knitting squares (about 11 cm square) and sewed them up, trying them on the long-suffering Alma (Figure 3).

To my surprise, the patchwork jumpers looked very pretty and became admired by all who feasted their eyes on them.

And the idea was born ...

It didn't come from me originally. Another nurse, Kerry, suggested we put an appeal on the Animal Health Trust website and



Figure 3. First patchwork jumper

Facebook page for people to knit squares and send them in to us for me to stitch together. As she said "everyone likes to see a dog in a jumper".

So we went to the AHT's Public Relations team and they loved the idea. They did

just say "you might be overwhelmed with squares". So perhaps I shouldn't have been surprised at what happened next.

The Facebook and website appeals went live, along with a photo of Ethel, Kerry's dog (Figure 4).

Can you help us knit more 'MRI jumpers' ?





Figure 4. Facebook appeal



Figure 5. More and more squares

We were getting so many squares that any idea that I'd be able to sew them all up flew right out of the window. The other anaesthesia nurse, Tina, started taking huge numbers home to sew up and would bring back beautiful jumpers that she'd stitched together. Another nurse, Coleen, took squares home for her mother and grandmother to sew up. A couple of wonderful members of the public offered to sew them up, so Tina and I started packing up boxloads of squares and posting them off. Other people, including nurse Toni's mother, sent in lovely jumpers of their own design.

Even so, we've had to put a lot of squares into storage. We'll fetch them out when we run short in the future and work our way through them.

The response was massive. Within days it was clear that we'd really started something. We were getting huge numbers of "likes" and "shares" and comments. Some of my friends said that they kept getting the appeal popping up on their Facebook pages as more and more people shared it.

The original appeal has now been shared nearly 2800 times and been seen by over 300,000 people!

And soon the parcels started coming in ...

It turns out that there are A LOT of knitters out there who care about our patients. Every day, my desk would be piled up with parcels – knitted squares, crocheted squares. The AHT's PR team sprang into action to help me cope with all the correspondence (Figure 5).

Soon people (thank goodness) started asking for templates to sew them up themselves. We published one, with instructions (Figure 6).

Since then, I've designed another one (Figure 7).

And then the jumpers started coming in ...

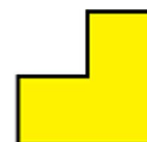
I would estimate that we've received several thousand squares and probably about 300 knitted jumpers. Some people made jumpers to their own designs. Some were big, some were small. Some of the squares came in rectangular and we've used them to make legwarmers. Alma was most unimpressed (Figure 8).

Template for an MRI Jumper.

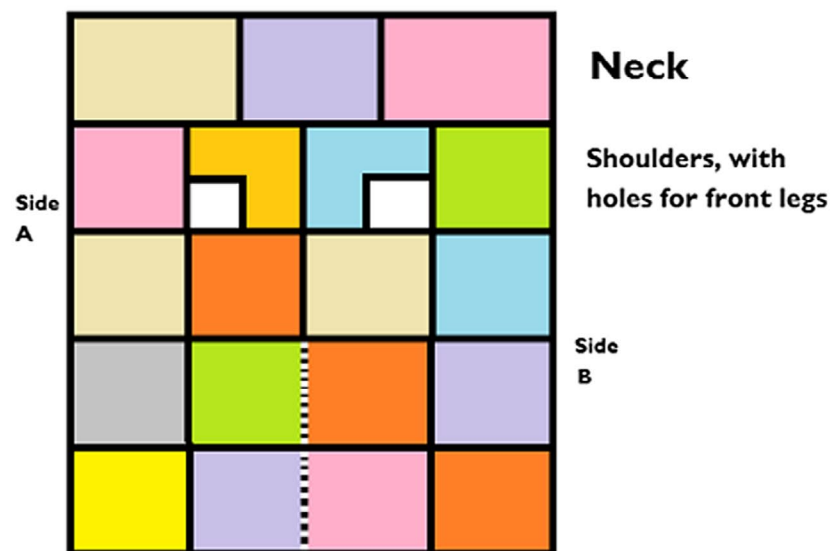
You will need:

17 x squares, knitted or crocheted, approximately 11 cm square, or cast on 24 stitches, using 4 mm needles, and knit a square.

2 x L shaped squares, basically an 11 cm square with a quarter missing



Stitch them together like this:



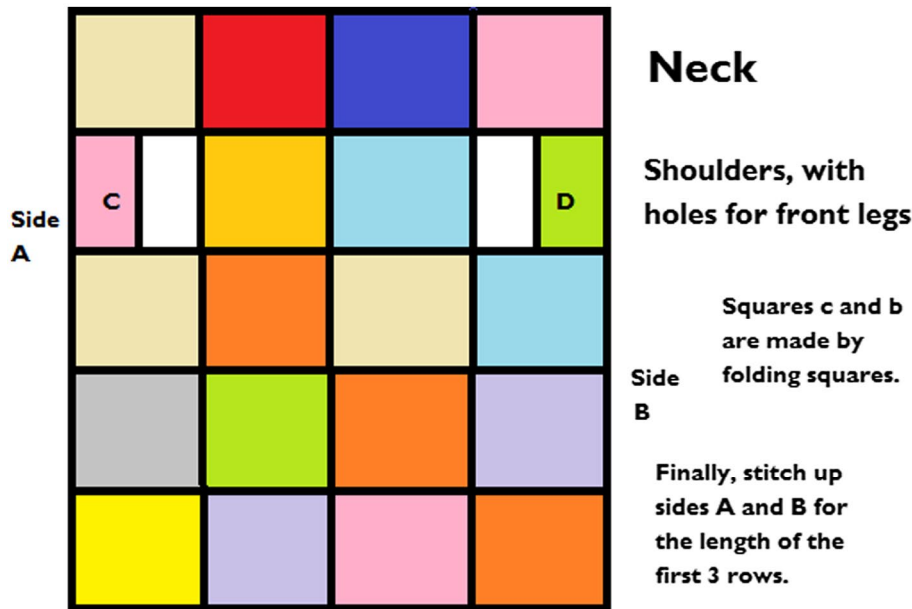
The squares for the neck look bigger, but they're the same size; they're just stretched as they're stitched together, so that the jumper is smaller at the neck.

The two L shaped ones are placed together as shown. Stitch all the squares together. Do not stitch along the dotted line.

Finally stitch Side A and Side B together and you're finished.

You could also do a design with an extra four squares at the bottom, for dogs with extra long backs.

Figure 6. First template



▲ Figure 7. Second template



▲ Figure 8. Legwarmers

And they keep coming in ...

We've put updates on Facebook and onto our website about the overwhelming response we've had, and that we really don't need any more squares! My own,



▲ Figure 9. Mabel



▲ Figure 10. Thanks to all the wonderful knitters

gorgeous little Mabel featured this time ... (Figure 9)

And that hasn't been the end of it. The appeal went out to some Women's Institute groups, and from there was seen by BBC Radio Suffolk's Lesley Dolphin, and I found myself being interviewed. Of course, I was brilliant.

I think the most touching aspect to it all has been the individual responses. Several people have sent in squares or jumpers in memory of their own dog or cat. Some have come in from children. We have had squares knitted beautifully by an 88-year-old lady who apologised for the quality of the knitting as she has arthritis in her hands. In front of me as I write this is a lovely card that accompanied another kind knitter's squares, with a photo of her cairn terrier who has been a patient of ours. OK – I know I'm prejudiced towards cairn terriers, but you'd have to agree that she's beautiful.

As well as the Women's Institute, people have taken the appeal to organisations such as Mind, various craft groups and a women's prison. We've had people saying that the knitting has been enjoyable for them to do while ill or unable to get about. One lady told us what a positive project it had made for her autistic daughter.

In short, knitters are wonderful! If your practice needs knitted jumpers, feel free to use my templates and instructions and start your own appeal. But don't be surprised if you find yourself drowning in knitted squares (Figure 10).

References

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