

Veterinary Nurse of the Year 2016

At the seventh annual IVNA Congress in May 2016, Catherine Hartin RVN won the Award for Veterinary Nurse of the Year 2016. Here, she discusses her career and veterinary nursing as a profession in Ireland



Winner of Veterinary Nurse of the Year, Catherine Hartin (centre); Lisa Joyce, IVNA Chairperson(left); and Margarette Tracy, Royal Canin. Credit: Eithne O'Brien.

Catherine Hartin is a full-time veterinary nurse at the small animal clinic, Briarhill Veterinary Clinic, Galway, where she works alongside two vets, Ruth Harkin and Riona Mac Eoin. She qualified in veterinary nursing from Letterkenny IT in 2011 and has been nursing for five years in various clinical placements around Ireland, having developed an interest in working with animals from a very early age.

"I was motivated to become a veterinary nurse from a very young age. I was always obsessed with animals and never had an interest in working in anything else but veterinary medicine. My Mum tells me I used to always come home from school and go outside and try and help any injured animals and try and nurse them back to health – I had varying degrees of success with that! We always had dogs and cats growing up; I remember feeling quite jealous of children who grew up on farms because I felt they had a lot more hands-on experience with livestock than I did. After sitting the Leaving Certificate exams twice, I didn't get the points for veterinary medicine so I decided to go down the veterinary nursing route," she says.

POSITIVE ASPECTS OF NURSING

"It's hard to pick just one positive aspect of veterinary nursing, but I really enjoy seeing a patient, who had been in dire straits, turn the corner and do well. A good example all nurses can relate to, I think, is when you get to bathe a puppy before sending it home, seeing it go from being at death's door to jumping and playing in the bath. It is such an amazing feeling – there's nothing more satisfying than that for me." Catherine is also very passionate about trying to solve the problem of Ireland's feral cat over-population and trap-neuter-return (TNR) work, where cats, that don't have a particular owner, are humanely trapped, sterilised and medically treated, and returned to the outdoor locations where they were found. If these locations are deemed

unsafe or otherwise inappropriate, feral cats are relocated to farmyard homes.

"Our clinic does a lot of work with the local charity – Galway Cat Rescue – and seeing the cat ward at work full of neutered, ear-tipped, healthy, happy feral cats, is the other part of this job I find most satisfying," she says.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE IS KEY

"I think the long hours and work-life balance challenge is something that all vets and nurses struggle with," Catherine says. "A lot of people in veterinary medicine put themselves under pressure to be 100% committed to the job, 100% of the time and can sometimes neglect resting themselves both physically and mentally. I think all nurses and vets have a habit of beating themselves up mentally over things too much. I would advise new graduates to make a decision



early on that you will maintain a good work-life balance and also make a clear divide between the two. I think it's good for your mental health, which is a big issue in this field. I'm lucky that I work in a clinic with vets who understand that we all need time away and so, we all make an effort to ensure we have a good balance in our work and personal lives."

ROLE OF THE VETERINARY NURSE

Catherine says that today, the role of the veterinary nurse is constantly evolving and is more important than ever. "I'm still relatively new to the field but, even in my short time, I have seen a shift from people not knowing what I was studying in college to now recognising what a veterinary nurse actually is and what we do day to day. Medicine is constantly changing, improving, and updating and so are we. Having a competent, confident nurse can really set your clinic apart and make the difference to a client, between an awful visit to the vet and a brilliant one. "I currently carry out pet weight-loss clinics and I am considering adding senior pet-wellness clinics to our practice. I am currently undertaking a feline nursing certificate through the International Society of Feline Management (ISFM) and would love to see more feline patients. At the moment, we have separate dog and cat consulting rooms so the vet can be using one room while I use the other. My plan for the future would be to have both rooms in use at all

times." Since winning the award last year, Catherine says she never realised how much people actually appreciated the veterinary nurse in practice. "I have had so many clients come and congratulate me. It has been such a lovely experience to realise how much you can touch the lives of your clients. I would love to see veterinary

nurses in general have more confidence in their abilities and hopefully one day get the pay and recognition that is deserved!"

The 2017 IVNA Awards nominations will be open from January 2017, where you can nominate a candidate that you feel deserves the award for veterinary nurse, student nurse and support staff

of the year. These awards recognise and highlight those who put that extra time and effort into their jobs. In the coming weeks, posters will be distributed to each practice, so why not place one in your reception and give the opportunity to your clients to nominate. See the IVNA's Facebook and Twitter accounts for more details and the www.ivna.ie website for the opening date.

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