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BRONX ZOO TO UCD VIA ST KITTS – A VETERINARY RESEARCHER'S JOURNEY

This month our researcher profile features Robin Farrell, Director of the Veterinary Nursing Programme in the School of Veterinary Medicine, whose research focuses on the improvement of learning environments and resources to facilitate students in attaining an outstanding education



Robin Farrell.

Born and raised in the small town of Irvington, New York, 50 miles north of New York City on the Hudson River, Robin knew she wanted to care for animals in some capacity very early in life. "My first official job working with animals was in the children's section of the Bronx Zoo as a teenager. I spent my weekends and summer days looking after a goose, chickens, sheep, llamas, pigmy goats, guinea pigs, rabbits, wallabies, lemurs, otters, prairie dogs, and a porcupine, and loved every minute of it."

Gaining experience

Following high school, Robin attended the University of Delaware and graduated in 1998 with a bachelor's degree in agricultural science. Following graduation, she decided she would pursue a veterinary technician position to gain experience in practice before deciding on an ultimate career path. "I was lucky enough to secure a position with the US military as a general practice veterinary technician in Heidelberg, Germany. I learned how to perform anaesthesia, dental prophylaxis, laboratory procedures, physical examinations and ran my own vaccine and wellness technician clinics."

By the time she moved back to the United States in 2000, Robin knew veterinary practice was where she wanted to be. "I continued to work as a veterinary technician for another two years in general practice and then as an intensive care technician in the Texas A&M Veterinary Teaching Hospital. I loved teaching students and was especially enamoured with the training we received as technicians using simulation."

Teaching in the tropics

In 2002, Robin packed up her two dogs and headed to the island of St. Kitts to start her veterinary school journey at Ross University School of Veterinary Medicine where she later gained a post as an instructor of clinical skills and director of the clinical skills laboratory. "The years I spent as a student and faculty member at Ross were some of the best years of my life. The school and island cultures were so inclusive and fun. At that time, clinical skills education using models in veterinary education was very new with only a few schools having a dedicated clinical skills laboratory."

Ross University School of Veterinary Medicine delivers a 3.5 year tri-semester programme with student intakes three times a year. "While teaching on a course that takes in a cohort of students every four months has its challenges, it is an excellent model in terms of learning to teach and the capacity to engage in educational research. During my 11 years at Ross, I taught thousands of students and was able to grow a strong research team in the area of educational research, specifically teaching, learning, and assessment of clinical and professional skills."

Full circle

So why did Robin leave a tropical island to take up a position at UCD? "I fell for an Irish man who is now my husband and we wanted to move closer to our children's grandparents. I was very excited to see the job post for the Director of Veterinary Nursing at UCD and even more excited when I received the offer to work here. Arriving on the UCD campus in 2018, it felt like coming home. The UCD School of Veterinary Medicine and Ireland have so many of the wonderful cultural characteristics that I appreciated in St Kitts and working with veterinary nurses and veterinary nursing students again has brought me full circle." Robin has thoroughly enjoyed returning to working in the veterinary nursing profession as an academic: "I also appreciate working on a campus with so many disciplines represented. It has given me an opportunity to pursue interdisciplinary research which I have found particularly rewarding. Working with and supporting students in their academic journey is my passion, animals are my joy, and doing research to improve learning environments and resources to facilitate students attaining an outstanding education is my endeavour."

"I am currently working with a fantastic team of veterinary nursing faculty and students developing and researching the effective use of technology to enhance learning, specifically the effective use of virtual simulation and the role of the virtual learning environment in improving student's metacognitive skills."

In her spare time, Robin enjoys travelling, fostering and training dogs, hillwalking, and spending time with her family.