

IVNA Student Veterinary Nurse of the Year Award 2016

Following on from last month's edition, we asked our IVNA Student Veterinary Nurse of the Year Award 2016, Elaine Hughes from Dublin, to discuss her career, how to access support and gives advice to newly qualified nurses



Elaine Hughes with her dog, Herbie.

Elaine describes her three-year course studying veterinary nursing at Dundalk Institute of Technology as a very 'intense and enjoyable course', which enabled her to experience all aspects of veterinary nursing, including equine veterinary medicine. "Prior to joining DkIT as a mature student in 2013, I had an interesting array of animal practice experience. I worked at Lissenhall Veterinary Hospital, Swords, for four years as a vet assistant, and also worked there at weekends during my studies, so seven years in total.

"I gained great large animal experience working on a colleague's farm and I also worked in a pet shop and as a dog groomer! All of these different roles contributed to my choosing veterinary nursing as a career in their own way."

REWARDING PART OF YOUR JOB

"It's difficult to choose a particular part of your job that is deemed rewarding, as every day in practice is different, and every day has its own reward for different reasons," Elaine says. If she had to choose a daily highlight, Elaine

says it is how lovely it is when clients appreciate the care provided and when there is a noticeable positive difference to them and their pets, having attended the practice. "I think the most difficult part of the role of a newly qualified nurse is starting your first job. It can be quite daunting and overwhelming for veterinary nurses who have not worked in practice before."

SUPPORT WITHIN THE VETERINARY COMMUNITY

"Personally, I have found the support excellent. I find veterinary nursing a close-knit career with a lot of support between nurses, especially now with social media groups," Elaine says. "I would recommend that students and registered veterinary nurses attend the Irish Veterinary Nursing Association (IVNA) Congress, if possible, as I have made some great contacts and friends there, and also I think a specific union representing veterinary nurses would also provide a welcome support structure."

VETERINARY NURSING IN PRACTICE TODAY

According to Elaine, veterinary nursing is still a growing profession, as many members of the public are not aware of the training, the veterinary subjects, which nurses study and specialise in, and the skills nurses can provide. In relation to the importance of the nursing clinic, Elaine says they are an extremely important aspect in today's practice as they provide us with a direct link to the public. "This allows us to raise the profile of veterinary nurses and it is an intricate part of nursing as it allows us to educate and support our clients, with the reward of job satisfaction for ourselves."

WINNING STUDENT NURSE OF THE YEAR AWARD

On winning the award, Elaine says she was very surprised. "It was an absolutely amazing feeling and having some of my veterinary nursing friends there with me made it even better." Since winning, she reflects on how the general public and her own perspective have changed. "I think it made some of my family, friends and clients more aware of what is involved in my career. It has not changed my own perspective as I have always been proud of what I do and I will continue to represent veterinary nursing to the best of my ability."

HOPES FOR THE FUTURE OF VETERINARY NURSING

"No veterinary nurse got into this career for the money. However, I do hope we eventually see a wage increase. We work extremely hard, and when our skills are realised and utilised to their full potential, we can be indispensable. I really feel the experience and level of responsibility should



Lisa Joyce, IVNA chairperson; Student Nurse of the Year, Elaine Hughes; and Joe Campbell, Allianz.

be reflected in wages, as currently there is a massive variation between different practices around Ireland."

ADVICE TO NEWLY QUALIFIED NURSES

Mental health is a key piece of personal advice that Elaine thinks every veterinary nurse starting in practice should pay attention to. "Veterinary nursing is an unbelievably rewarding, interesting and exciting career. However, it also involves high levels of stress and emotions," she says. Elaine also expressed how important it is to take up a hobby, and have a colleague, friend or family member you can speak to. "Most importantly, you need to accept that there will be bad days, prepare for them, and don't try and do it all alone. Support is essential in this profession!"

VETERINARY NURSING NOMINATIONS FOR 2017

Nominations for Veterinary Nurse, Student Nurse and Support Staff of the Year will be opening in January 2017. We will be announcing the date on social media through our Facebook and Twitter page. You can nominate on www.ivna.ie once nominations are open. The veterinary nursing accolades are important when acknowledging excellence in our industry. Please don't forget this year to place the awards posters in your reception area and give your clients the opportunity to nominate a member of your team. All our winners in 2016 were nominations from clients and it is their way of thanking the individuals that have helped them through tough times and decisions.

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