

# Obituary- Dr Anne Vaughan-Thomas BSc PhD (1963-2009)



In a tribute to Anne Vaughan-Thomas, John Innes, Vic Duance, Peter Clegg and Eithne Comerford write:

Anne Vaughan-Thomas was born a native Welsh speaker in July 1963 in Whitland, Carmarthenshire. She attended Henllan Amgoed primary and Whitland Grammar School, Carmarthenshire, and obtained her first degree in biochemistry from University College Cardiff. This was immediately followed by a PhD on “Immunodetection of rat lipoprotein lipase” supervised by Professor Tony Cryer and awarded in 1988. The first four years of Anne’s working life were with Smithkline Beecham Pharmaceuticals in Harlow where she was scientific officer and higher scientific officer. It was here that her involvement in the arthritis programme sparked her career-long interest in arthritis and connective tissues. In 1991, somewhat disillusioned with industry, Anne wrote to Dr Vic Duance asking if he had any research positions available. Vic took her on, and Anne took up a post-doctoral position in the newly formed, and soon to become internationally renowned, Muscle and Collagen Research group at the University of Bristol. The group had emerged from the recently closed Institute of Food Research and was based at Langford alongside the clinical veterinary department. With such neighbours, it was inevitable that interaction and interest in veterinary disorders would become part of Anne’s portfolio alongside her fundamental studies on collagen, with particular interests in collagen types IX and XI. Articular cartilage was the specific focus for the studies and the work would contribute to the understanding of this complex tissue in the fight against arthritis. Her work at Bristol was funded by the Nuffield Foundation and the Arthritis and Rheumatism Council (now the Arthritis Research Campaign) and it was a vibrant time as the group rose to achieve star-rated performance in the first of the UK government’s research assessment exercises.

When Vic Duance was offered a move to Cardiff University as part of Cardiff’s strategy to become a leader in connective tissue disorders, Anne could not resist the chance to move back to her homeland. Here she worked with some of the brightest scientists in connective tissue research and the Connective Tissue Biology Laboratories, Cardiff School of Biosciences became a major player internationally. Anne’s role as a senior research associate, funded by the Wellcome Trust and the Arthritis Research Campaign, found her mentoring

many undergraduate and postgraduate students in this large group of scientists. Anne was known for her kind, generous nature with extreme patience and wonderful insight in to problems that others might be facing. Such sensitivity can be rare in the rather competitive world of peer-reviewed science, but it is to Anne's credit that this super quality never left her.

In 2002, the chance to move in to an independent academic position arrived and Anne moved north to the Veterinary School at Liverpool (still not far from the Welsh border though!) to take up a lectureship in the Connective Tissue Research Group. Here, Anne became a linchpin for the group's laboratory work, guiding several post-docs, research assistants, PhD students and numerous undergraduate students through their projects. In 2005, Anne organised a scientific meeting in Liverpool on behalf of the British Society of Matrix Biology. It was testimony to Anne's standing in the scientific community that she was able to attract some of the world's best speakers to the meeting.

In the last two years of her life, despite being diagnosed with intra-abdominal metastatic breast cancer, Anne continued to work hard and make a major contribution to the group in Liverpool. She established in vitro models of canine and feline cartilage degradation and contributed to the science behind Hill's prescription diets canine and feline j/d. Anne also supervised several animal health contract research projects for companies including Boehringer Ingelheim, Intervet-Schering Plough, Merial and Pfizer on the properties of various pharmaceutical agents. In this way, Anne contributed to the health and welfare of veterinary species and influenced everyday veterinary practice.

At the suggestion of her oncologist, bravely and importantly, Anne also sat on a NHS NICE panel as a patient representative developing national guidelines for care of patients with metastatic disease of unknown primary lesions. With her sharp mind, Anne was not only able to understand all the science, but was also able to articulate the needs of patients clearly and strongly, in what were often intensely political meetings. Truly, Anne's desire to help others, and put others first, shone through in this task, along with everything she did. Our sincere condolences go to Anne's mother, Irene, her sister Margaret and the rest of her family.