

#SundayWiMIN23 Week 50: Professor Sarah Rogers (1946-2023)

“Consultant dermatologist Prof Sarah Rogers was one of the State’s first female consultants and has been credited with modernising dermatological medicine in Ireland.

She was the older of two children born in Dublin’s Glasnevin to Harry, a GP, and Maura, a former civil servant. At school in Maryfield College, she was encouraged to skip ahead because of her academic ability. She left school aged 16, before the Leaving Cert, to study medicine at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI). Despite her youth, she was able to outshine her fellow students, winning academic awards in the college and at Richmond Hospital where she trained.

Her love of music deepened during her adolescence, when she would while away many hours browsing through the singles and albums at the Tara Records shop. In his funeral eulogy, her brother, Prof Tom Rogers, recalled one family holiday in the south of England when he accompanied her to see “a new English group we had hardly heard of before known as The Beatles”.

She qualified from the RCSI when she was 22, and three years later received her MRCP in general medicine. While her father hoped she might take over his GP practice, she opted to specialise in dermatology and took up training posts in Leeds, Belfast and Newcastle upon Tyne. The results of her research on psoriasis treatments were published in the Lancet, and she would go on to be published widely in peer-reviewed journals during her career.

She returned to Ireland in 1979 to take up a post as consultant dermatologist, working between Hume Street’s skin and cancer hospital and St Vincent’s hospital. She established the State’s first day care unit for psoriasis, along with matron Maeve Dwyer, who would become a lifelong friend. Prof Rogers was known for encouraging young doctors to get involved in research and to travel abroad to learn about new developments. As a professor of dermatology at University College Dublin, she was seen as an excellent teacher and an entertaining lecturer.

An Irish Association of Dermatologists tribute from Prof Brian Kirby, Dr Marina O’Kane and Prof Anne-Marie Tobin described her as “a wonderful clinician, who had great empathy with her patients”. They said she embraced clinical trials of new therapies and conceived and managed multiple clinical studies which had worldwide impact. “She was a skilled and kind mentor, inspiring dozens of dermatologists in whom she instilled the importance of clinical research and imparted so much knowledge about all aspects of dermatology and life,” they wrote.

Consultant dermatologist Prof Caitriona Ryan was one colleague who benefited from her mentoring. “It was Sarah who ignited my own passion for psoriasis research and organised for me to continue my research and training in Dallas, Texas, where she visited me frequently during my seven years there,” she recalled. “I cannot imagine how different my own career and life would have been without her encouragement and support.”

She was involved in too many organisations to mention, but her notable contributions

included her presidencies of both the Irish Association of Dermatologists and the prestigious Dowling Club in the UK, and her board membership of the European Academy of Dermatology and Venereology.

She married Mike Ryan after meeting him at a party in Belfast about 1980 and the couple had two children, Etáin and Daragh. Tragedy struck the family in 2017 when Daragh (30) was struck by a car while cycling and died. Friends said the dreadful loss made her determined to live life to the fullest. "Despite this unimaginable loss, she continued to inspire those around her with her strength, resilience and sense of fun," Prof Ryan said.

Other tributes described her as "a force of nature" and "wonderfully exuberant". She gathered friends with ease and had a great curiosity about people. One former patient wrote that she looked forward to her hospital appointments because "as well as being a caring and attentive doctor, Sarah was such great fun and we had lovely chats". She also noted how kind and supportive she was with younger staff.

After retirement, she returned to academia with gusto. She did her Leaving Certificate in Latin and her brother recalled how she regularly texted her tutor in Latin. She went on to do a degree in Latin and Classic Civilisation in Trinity College Dublin, followed by an MPhil which produced a thesis, Psoriasis in Antiquity, combining two of the great interests in her life.

When she wasn't working – and even when she was – she made time for choral singing and was an enthusiastic contributor to Our Lady's Choral Society and the Irish Doctors' Choir. She was a strong supporter of Wexford Festival Opera. Colleagues recalled hearing her singing Handel's Messiah in her clinics as the annual Christmas performances in the National Concert Hall loomed.

She died suddenly at home, not long after returning from a trip to German opera houses with the Wagner Society. Prof Ryan said her friends and colleagues were heartbroken at her sudden and unexpected passing, but her legacy would live on in the countless lives she touched in her medical, academic and personal life.

Prof Sarah Rogers was predeceased by her son Daragh and is survived by her husband Mike, daughter Etáin, brother Tom, and extended family."

From the Irish Times, Saturday May 27th 2023 -

<https://www.irishtimes.com/obituaries/2023/05/27/prof-sarah-rogers-obituary-empathetic-clinician-with-a-flair-for-music/>