

## If you can handle vet school, you can handle anything

Jolle Kirpensteijn grew up in The Netherlands and now lives in the USA. He is the most recent recipient of the WSAVA's President's Award

At school, I was fascinated by mechanics and engineering and set my sights on becoming a fighter pilot. Eventually, after rejecting the advice of a careers counsellor who suggested I would be better suited to career such as forestry, where I could be outside using my hands, I realised my love of animals was important to me and decided to try for veterinary medicine.

I grew up in the Netherlands and, at that time, a lottery system determined entrance to the country's only veterinary school, Utrecht University Faculty of Veterinary Medicine. The lottery's purpose was to restrict entry, ensuring only those with the very highest grades were accepted. I worked hard, but wasn't accepted at my first attempt.

I was advised to start studying biology at university – a subject I hadn't chosen at school while I was in my 'fighter pilot' phase. As my colleagues know, I don't always make logical choices and I prefer to follow my heart. At the time, I wasn't interested in biology and decided to study history instead.

Eventually, in 1981, I was accepted into veterinary school. I qualified in 1988 and had a conversation with one of the Netherlands' veterinary orthopaedic pioneers, Freek Meustege, which – although I didn't know it at the time – has shaped my entire career.

He urged me to undertake an externship in the USA to increase my experience.

I wrote to all the veterinary schools in the USA and was accepted onto a training programme in small animal medicine and surgery at the University of Georgia in 1989.

After years of traditional style lectures and study at Utrecht, learning in the USA, particularly the practical training, was a revelation. The externship was seven months of pure pleasure. After finishing vet school and an internship, I completed my residency training in small animal surgery and a Master's degree at Kansas State University. Next came a fellowship in surgical oncology at the Colorado State University's Comparative Oncology Unit, supervised by Steve Withrow.

In 1993, I was ready to go home and saw an opportunity to bring what I had learned in the USA to veterinary students in Europe. I became assistant professor in surgical oncology and soft tissue surgery at Utrecht University and studied for my PhD. In 2005, I was appointed professor in surgery at the University of Copenhagen and, in August 2008, I returned to Utrecht as full time professor in soft tissue surgery.

In November 2013, I took a big step and moved into the corporate world, taking



**'I saw an opportunity to bring what I had learned in the USA to veterinary students in Europe'**

on the role of chief professional relations officer at Hill's Pet Nutrition. It required me to move back to the USA and I now live in Kansas, close to Hill's Global Headquarters in Topeka.

Moving from academia into the business world was an exciting step, but having always been interested in the business aspects of the veterinary profession, it was a challenge I was keen to embrace.

I am effectively the interface between Hill's and the profession worldwide, and I travel almost constantly, attending congresses around the world, lecturing and meeting individual veterinarians.

**Vet Record Careers aims to reflect the diverse range of career opportunities available to vets and related professionals. Suggestions for articles are welcome, and should be sent to [vetcareerseditorial@bva-edit.co.uk](mailto:vetcareerseditorial@bva-edit.co.uk)**

**WSAVA involvement**

I got involved with the World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA) as the member representative for the Netherlands in 1995.

It is a fantastic association – run by volunteers – which champions the role of companion animal veterinarians around the world, supports veterinarians in parts of the world where companion animal practice is still emerging and provides a global voice for the profession.

Even though it was doing great work, I could see that changes could make it stronger, more effective and more efficient. I joined the executive board in 2006 and became president in 2010, a role I held until 2012 and one that I resumed temporarily in 2013, following the sad and unexpected illness of the incoming president Peter Ihrke.

During my time as president, I worked with the executive board to enhance its operations and work in areas including communicating with our stakeholders, making our continuing education initiatives more effective and developing a clear strategy.

The achievement I'm most proud of during my presidency was the



Kirpensteijn (far left) was awarded the WSAVA President's Award in recognition of his service to the association. He received the award from current president Walt Ingwersen (right) during the association's annual assembly meeting, on September 24, 2017, in Copenhagen

relationship we built with the OIE – the World Organisation for Animal Health – the intergovernmental organisation responsible for improving animal health worldwide.

At the time, the OIE was focused on production animals and did not yet see the relevance of companion animals to its work. Working with my WSAVA colleague Michael Day, chair of its Vaccination Guidelines Group and One

Health Committee, we convinced the OIE of the importance of companion animal veterinary care in tackling global infectious diseases, such as rabies.

The OIE took this on board and, in 2011, we signed a memorandum of understanding to promote increased collaboration and were granted full observer status at the OIE general assembly. We have had a fruitful and very important partnership ever since.

The right nutrition, combined with the devotion of veterinary professionals can transform the lives of pets – and healthier and happier pets can transform the lives of pet parents and owners. This is a message I am passionate about sharing.

As Hill's is a longstanding and significant partner of the WSAVA, I can stay involved with the association and promote its work as a sponsor rather than a serving official.

Overall, I love the demands of my role and never get tired despite the constant travelling. The job is a perfect fit for me.

**'My message to young vets starting out is to be really open-minded when thinking about your career'**

In what little time I have away from the profession, I enjoy painting in acrylics. It is the one thing that enables me to be entirely alone and introverted. I love history and am a long-term subscriber to National Geographic's History Magazine. And, I guess, there is still time for me to learn to fly!

My career path shows how important it is to push yourself out of your comfort zone, to travel and to try new things and new approaches. My message to young vets starting out is to be really open-minded when thinking about your career. As a veterinary professionals, we have a fantastic qualification that opens doors to many careers. My mantra is, if you can handle vet school, you can handle anything.

The opportunities for you are limitless – so get out there and embrace them.

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**People**

**Davies appoints new finance director**

Davies Veterinary Specialists has appointed a Nick Bayston FCCA as its new finance director.

Bayston, a chartered certified accountant, is an experienced finance director with extensive knowledge of accounting and finance, corporate strategy, IT, facilities, risk management, governance, contract and company law. He has worked in the IT services sector for the past 15 years, with a diverse range of clients from small healthcare practices to the world's leading insurance companies.



**CVS appoints new director**

CVS has appointed James Kennedy as the director of its farm division, CVS Farm. In this role, he will be responsible for continuing its growth and for building the company's reputation in the farm veterinary sector.

Kennedy qualified from Glasgow University in 2002 before joining Rosemullion Veterinary Practice, a mixed practice in Falmouth, Cornwall. He became a director of Rosemullion in 2008.



**Improve International appoints veterinary operations manager**

Juliet Pope will help the company deliver its range of modular CPD courses and oversee its day-to-day business operations.

She qualified from the University of Bristol and has worked in large animal, mixed and small animal practices. She obtained the RCVS Certificate in small animal surgery, undertook a soft tissue surgery residency and spent 10 years accepting referrals in soft tissue surgery as an RCVS Recognised Advanced Practitioner in small animal surgery.

