



Double award for professor

Gail Bell

AN **ULSTER** University professor who picked up two major awards within weeks of each other, has now her sights set on eradicating world blindness.

Professor Tara Moore, associate director of the Biomedical Science Research Institute and Vision Science Research group leader at the university, is at the leading edge of research on genetic mutations causing eye disease.

Last week her role was officially recognised with the 'Advancing Diversity in the Workplace Award' at the annual Women in Business NI event in Belfast – shortly after winning a Wise (Women in Science and Engineering) Hero Award in London.

The 41-year-old mother-of-seven was presented with the Wise award in recognition of her contribution to improving people's lives through science, engineering and technology.

Her research has already made a significant contribution towards finding a cure for blinding eye diseases, while her contribution to forensic and legal medicine has been used as best practice in training health care professionals.

Attributing her success to her mother – “who has always been a strong role model” – alongside the support of husband, Professor Johnny Moore, she said she hoped her efforts would inspire students and staff “to make a difference through science”.

Tara, who helps Johnny run The Cathedral Eye Clinic in Belfast, as well as working full-time at the Coleraine campus of Ulster University and caring for her seven children – two of whom have health difficulties due to Down's Syndrome – says it is her life's ambition to eradicate blindness.

“I am very hopeful about the

outcome of current research, which is showing encouraging results in correcting cell mutations,” she says.

“Developing new therapies is ongoing and vital. I meet parents who are desperate to save their children's sight and that is great motivation for me to continue.”

A graduate from Queen's University with a PhD in Immunology and Virology, Tara has travelled the world carrying out groundbreaking research into eye diseases, her most recent trip being to Bolivia in the summer with UK charity, Andean Medical Mission.

She and Johnny visited outlying Bolivian villages, collecting eye tissue for research purposes and performing sight-restoring eye surgery on around 20 patients a day over three weeks.

“It was an amazing experience and very emotional, as the people who lived in these remote villages had no access to eye care at all,” she said. “Johnny removed about 60 benign growths due to a disease called Pterygium, which is linked to UV light, but one of the highlights for me was when three members of one family had their sight restored through simple cataract surgery. That made everything worthwhile.”

For someone who was deterred from training as a vet due to her sex, she has propelled the role of successful working mother to brave new heights – and sometimes looks back in wonder at how it happened.

“I think, ‘Wow! How did I find the time to pack that all in?’” she muses, “but I think to work at this level with a large family you just need to be well organised and have a good support mechanism in place.”

“I was brought up on a farm near Castledawson and my dad told me farmers wouldn't want a slim young girl as a

vet, but I have no regrets – apart from having a poor grasp of languages. That is why all my children are now learning Mandarin – even the one year-old.

“I want them to be more cultured in the arts than me. I love science but I definitely wouldn't win any awards for my Italian or French.”



■ **PLANS TO ERADICATE BLINDNESS:** **Ulster University** Professor Tara Moore is pictured being presented with the prestigious Wise (Women in to Science & Engineering) Hero Award in London recently by Princess Anne