



**Dr. Robyn Tobias** - a remarkable colleague, educator, and nurse whose impact resonates deeply within our profession and our hearts passed away January 2, 2025 in Birmingham. We remember her foremost as a nurse—committed to the art and science of caregiving—and as an educator, scholar, and mentor who shaped countless lives. Robyn was more than a faculty member at UTC; she expected excellence, was a passionate advocate for education and healthcare, and was an inspiration to all who had the privilege of knowing her.

Robyn’s academic and professional journey was extraordinary, a testament to her determination and love of learning. Her connection with UTC began when she pursued a degree in Exercise Science, and then her Bachelor of Science in Nursing. After earning her nursing degree, Robyn embarked on a diverse career at CHI Memorial Health Care System. She served in roles ranging from

the RN in the Medical ICU to Nurse Manager and Nurse Recruiter. To her patients, she was a lifeline, combining clinical expertise with genuine empathy. Despite the demands of her career, Robyn's passion for education called her back to UTC to pursue her MSN. While in school she worked as both a hospice nurse and a graduate assistant in the undergraduate nursing program. It was here that her love for teaching truly flourished. She was assigned to Fundamentals, a foundational course introducing students to patient care. Robyn proved to be a calming and supportive presence for students navigating their first clinical experiences.

After earning her MSN and becoming a certified Family Nurse Practitioner, Robyn worked in clinical practice in neurology, bariatric medicine, urgent care and at UTS' student health before returning to UTC as a full-time faculty member in 2013. Her primary focus was the RN-BSN Gateway program, although she was clinical faculty in the Family Nurse Practitioner Program for the adult and pediatric courses. Together with Dr. Susan Davidson, they mentored hundreds of associate degree nurses completing their BSN, fostering a foundation for many to pursue advanced degrees and leadership roles in nursing. Robyn's influence extended far beyond the classroom; her work helped shape the very structure of nursing education, including collaborations with Chattanooga State Community College to create seamless

pathways for associate degree nurses wishing to earn a BSN. Robyn again wanted to further her education, so she enrolled in courses and earned the Doctor of Nursing Practice from UTC in December 2023 despite the many health challenges she faced during those years. Maybe that is the reason Dr. Tobias chose to focus her doctoral work on resilience, especially for new graduate nurses. Robyn is the epitome of resilience, strength and toughness.

Robyn was deeply engaged in the life of the university, serving on numerous committees and contributing to initiatives that reached beyond the School of Nursing. She also achieved the prestigious Quality Matters Professional Certification for online learning, exemplifying her dedication to excellence in education.

Her scholarly contributions were equally impressive. While not an expectation of her rank, Robyn engaged in research exploring critical topics, such as dry needling contamination risks with an interprofessional team from UTC, Utilization of Physical Assessment Techniques by Registered Nurses with colleagues from the School of Nursing, and research about online RN-BSN education with Dr. Davidson. Her culminating and most important work focused on resilience training for new graduate nurses. Her work was presented at esteemed conferences worldwide, including Sigma Theta Tau

International in Indianapolis, Cambridge University and in Edinburg, UK and at the Southern Nursing Research Society. She has been published in prominent nursing peer reviewed journals including the *Journal for Nursing Education* and the *Journal for Nurse Practitioners*. Dean Valerie Rutledge awarded Dr Tobias and Dr Davidson the College of Health, Education, and Human Performance Outstanding Service/Outreach Award for 2020 for their Bloom Project, which focused on the needs of UTC students. Awards and national recognition aside, Robyn approached scholarship with quiet humility, focusing on the tangible impact her work could make in nursing practice and education.

Robyn's students often described her as a transformative mentor. They spoke of her ability to instill confidence, nurture a deeper understanding of their profession and foster resilience (a theme). Her approachable demeanor and unwavering support made her an invaluable guide, whether students were overcoming challenges or striving to achieve their goals which included pursuing a graduate degree or seeking positions in nursing administration. To her students, she was a source of inspiration, guiding them to believe in themselves even when they faced doubt.

Outside her professional accomplishments, Robyn was a force of kindness in the community. Certified as a smoking cessation instructor for the American Cancer Society, she worked tirelessly to improve public health. She also served as a leader in the Chattanooga Area Nurses in Advanced Practice, as a member of the Tennessee Neuroendocrine Cancer Support Group, and as a volunteer for Hope for One Adoption reflecting her commitment to making a difference beyond the walls of academia.

To her colleagues, Robyn was a friend—reliable, compassionate, and endlessly supportive. Asking the faculty and staff to describe Robyn, they said the following: beautiful inside and out, family focused, kind, willing to help, the epitome of class, and grace, passionate about and committed to building resilience among nurses, brave, phenomenal strength and character, an incredibly loving spirit. She brought warmth, inclusivity, humor, and a down-to-earth energy to any space she held. She was always smiling. She seemed to always put others first. A quote from a colleague, Literally, I cannot think of a time I saw her without a smile on her face. But the most prominent thing I remember when I think of Robyn was how much she loved her family and how proud she was of them! Her eyes always glistened when we had talks about raising boys, especially when we talked about baseball successes (and drama). And most importantly, her disease did not define her.

In the School of Nursing, we celebrate Robyn's extraordinary life, yet we also recognize the legacy she leaves behind. Her influence will continue to shine through the lives of the students she mentored, the colleagues she inspired, and the patients for whom she cared. Robyn taught us many lessons—the power of perseverance, the importance of compassion, and the transformative potential of education. Though her absence leaves an immeasurable void, her legacy of hope and resilience will forever be a part of us.

**Thank you, Robyn, for your wisdom, kindness, and unwavering dedication. You will be deeply missed but never forgotten.**

