

Occasional Address to University of Canberra Graduates on 12 April 2018

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Chancellor (Professor Tom Calma, AO), Vice Chancellor (Professor Deep Saini), Members of Council, Acting Executive Dean (Professor Dominic Upton), Members of the Faculty, Graduates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today, the Ngunnawal people and pay my respects to their Elders, both past and present.

It is with great honour I address you today. It may seem strange that a nurse is addressing so many non-nursing graduates however as Health Professionals we rarely work alone. The majority of our work is in multi-disciplinary teams. This collaborative approach has proven to deliver the best outcomes for our patients and the community. Within these teams it is often the nurse who is the conduit and the glue that binds all working parts together as it is the nurse who has contact with the patient and their family 24 hours a day. You have all chosen your professions well I acknowledge the vast range of health personnel graduating today and the importance of all these roles. It is such a privilege to serve the community as a Health Professional. We care for community members from the cradle to the grave sharing in moments of their lives when they are happy, sad and at their most vulnerable. We are trusted and relied upon in times of need and fill the gaps when family and friends are not available or accessible. As Health Professionals we are leaders and the community will look to you to provide guidance and stability in times of uncertainty.

This is only the beginning of your learning. Life will take you down some interesting pathways and you may end up in places you never thought possible. I commenced my career as a young 17 year old without much life experience and definitely had no intent of joining the Military and yet here I am. The one thing that you will quickly realise is that there is so much you don't know and that to succeed in the Health world you need to keep seeking knowledge and skills. Those of you completing post graduate studies have already realised this fact. As you heard from my biography I am hospital

trained for both my general nursing and midwifery however I then went on to undertake further education in the tertiary sector which included child and family health, adolescent mental health, adult education and finally rural and isolated practice. Every single one of these qualifications has provided me the necessary knowledge and skills to perform my role as a Health Professional effectively whether that be here in Australia or overseas on deployment. Each role I have commenced has required a huge learning curve however has also increased my opportunity to grow and become a better health professional. It is through ongoing education and acceptance that you can always learn more as you strive for professional mastery that has set me up for success.

In my earlier days, managing a teenage parenting clinic as you can imagine was both challenging and rewarding. Apart from spending a lot of my time in court and with protective services to ensure child safety, I soon realised that this community group had missed many different events by leaving school early to raise their children. When questioned on what they felt they had missed the most and would like the opportunity to still achieve, they indicated that the fact they had not graduated and missed the chance to attend a school formal was something that really bothered them. I was lucky enough to secure some funding through Vic Health so devised a program for these young mums called "Mums to the Max" this program was a 12 week program and took a holistic care approach which incorporated fitness, nutrition, health promotion and education activities as well as positive parenting sessions. We also had a psychologist to work through any individual issues identified during the program. We had a few minor issues along the way particularly during the ball room dancing lessons and I must admit I was a bit concerned about a few of the members not completing the program and had to remind them on what was expected for them to graduate. However at the end of this program all participants did graduate with a formal dance and together with their children were presented to the Mayor of Ballarat and their families and friends. It was amazing what a positive effect this program had on these young women and their self-esteem and how helping them achieve one of their dreams increased their compliance and willingness to improve their own health and wellbeing.

After managing the teenage parenting clinic for five years and at the age of 35, I decided to do something less stressful - so I joined the Army full time! I think

this was definitely my midlife crisis. My own children were young at the time my twin daughters were seven and my son was just four. I had been in the Army Reserve for ten years and really enjoyed the work and the fact they paid you to keep fit. Being a distance runner this really appealed to me and I was at a point in my career where I felt I needed a change and wanted to move into the clinical education field. The military seemed the logical place to work toward this goal.

Upon commissioning and completing my military training I was posted to Brisbane to one of the military hospitals. Not long after arriving the unit was sent to East Timor as part of the United Nations (UN) Hospital located in Dili. This was such an amazing opportunity to work in a Multi-National setting and practice everything I had just learnt. I left on Boxing Day 2000 with my husband and children all standing in the driveway crying as the taxi pulled out. I had no idea what to expect and the fact I had a weapon and live ammunition once in country was very daunting. However the team I was deployed with was fantastic and we all quickly got on with the job. The UN Hospital had a mixture of nationalities working together. The Korean special forces was providing our security, the Singaporeans were providing a primary health care section and physiotherapy, the Egyptians were providing a resuscitation bay, an operating theatre and a ward and the Australians were also providing a resuscitation bay, an operating theatre, an intensive care unit and a ward. There were some obvious language and cultural barriers however through interpreters and a willingness to cooperate from all parties our multi-national arrangement seemed to work. You learn to be very resourceful when working in environments with limited facilities, equipment and staff. We were all health professionals there to achieve the same end state – the provision of vital health care to UN and local populous.

Our mandate was to treat United Nations Forces. The Red Cross Hospital was responsible for treating the local population however we had numerous cases that came through our doors and once in location we never refused any treatment. One particular case that demonstrates resourcefulness was when an 18 year old Timorese pregnant woman who was fitting came into our resuscitation bay. Being the only midwife on staff I was summoned. We established that she was approximately 34 weeks and with no history assumed

this woman was suffering from pre-eclampsia. We knew that we needed to deliver the baby if we were to save both the mother and baby so she was transferred to our operating theatre. Unfortunately we do not always have an Obstetrician on staff; however luckily we had two experienced surgeons who were able to perform this task safely. They quickly stepped up to the task and under some gentle encouragement they delivered a floppy blue baby to me for resuscitation. I commenced resuscitation with the bag and mask and some help from our intensive care staff who were able to titrate paediatric dose medications for me to counteract what had been given to the mother to stop her fitting and the baby started to pink up. When all of a sudden the Surgeons yelled out guess what we have another one in here. Working hard to keep my baby going, I quickly let them know that I had my hands full and I could not resuscitate a second baby. The Anaesthetist quickly stepped up and offered to resuscitate the second baby and I was grateful to have an extra pair of skilled hands. With the anaesthetist now in place we were able to intubate both babies and ventilate. It took a few hours before the babies were breathing on their own with just oxygen supplementation however this was a great relief for all staff involved. Twenty four hours later we were able to transfer the babies to the Red Cross Hospital for ongoing care. The mother stayed in our intensive care unit for a period of time before being discharged it turned out she had Japanese Encephalitis. This example demonstrates the resourcefulness, creativity and team work required in a health environment. It also highlights opportunities that present when you least expect it and how embracing those opportunities can lead to amazing experiences and growth.

In 2014 after completing my Rural and Isolated Practice Registered Nurses course I was selected to participate in the Army Aboriginal Community Assistance Program (AACAP). This program is run each year in different indigenous communities. AACAP is a co-operative initiative between the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Department of Health and Ageing and Army to improve environmental health conditions within remote Aboriginal communities. Each project has a construction component, a health component and a training component. The health component focuses on augmenting existing community medical, dental and veterinary programs. In 2014 we were located 220km SE from Tennant creek between two indigenous towns Wutunugurra and Canteen Creek. Each

community had a health clinic and one rural nurse. All other Health Professionals flew in at different intervals to help service these communities. On arrival we were warmly welcomed by both communities and soon gained the trust of the local population in assisting in providing their health care. Our team consisted of a doctor, 2 nurses, 4 medics, pathologist, radiographer, pharmacist, 2 environmental health officers, 1 dentist and 2 assistants and a vet. Our team was able to assist the Rural Nurses in providing all the annual children's health checks, immunisations, dental treatment, health education programs and ongoing health care of all community members. This included provision of a midwifery care and screening service in collaboration with the local midwife who could only visit monthly. In addition to this we also provided veterinary care to the large dog population and testing and purification of the local water supply. The two rural nurses really appreciated the support we provided for the four months we were in location and were able to achieve all their health targets during this time. This example once again highlights how a collaborative approach and team effort can provide optimal outcomes within the community.

In closing, my message is that collaboration as part of a multi-disciplinary team and lifelong learning will set you up for success as a Health Professional. Be a leader in your field, at this stage of your career you may not have considered the future and what opportunities you may want to pursue. However I would encourage you all to keep an open mind as the world really is your oyster. There are so many pathways you can follow both here in Australia and overseas. As I mentioned joining the military was never on my agenda and yet here I am. I have had the most amazing career and been so very lucky in the opportunities presented to me and experiences I have had.

However, today is all about you and your fantastic achievement thus far. To the families and friends; your support and encouragement for the graduates is much appreciated and has greatly contributed to them achieving their goal. To the University staff; what a fantastic day - all that hard work has definitely paid off. I wish you all the best for the future and look forward to this next generation of Health Professionals serving the Australian community. Congratulations on your conferring of an award today enjoy your well-earned celebrations. Thank you.