

**University of Canberra - Graduation Occasional Address**  
**Adjunct Professor Kylie Ward**  
**RN, MMgt, FACN, FCHSM, Wharton Fellow, FAICD**  
**20 March 2024 – 10am**

Good morning, Chancellor Lisa Paul AO PSM, Interim Vice-Chancellor Professor Lucy Johnston, University of Canberra Executive Members, distinguished guests, graduates, families and friends.

I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, the Ngunnawal people and pay my respects to elders past and present.

As someone who cares deeply about people and their wellbeing, I am truly honoured to be here on such a significant day in your lives to give the Occasional Address for the Faculty of Health. It is my honour to be an Adjunct Professor of the University of Canberra as I too believe in the University's mission - to prepare students for professional life.

Australia is one of the most educated countries in the world, ranking consistently in the top 10. But you have now entered what less than 5% of the global population will experience attaining a bachelor's degree. Today marks a significant achievement for you, for your loved ones and the for the social capital of our society. Especially for women and girls and gender equality.

You are graduating into some of the most trusted professions in the world and at a remarkable time where the health of the nation, and the health of the world has dominated our lives, our behaviours, our economy, our politics and our ability to connect.

My pronouns are she/her. Whether you identify as binary, non-binary or fluid, how we relate to each other has changed dramatically over recent years, and for each of us to be at our best we must understand the social construct and social context of where we live and where we work.

Whilst your focus will no doubt be locally to begin with, I ask that each of you be guided by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, remembering that health is a human right and that we should all be striving for the pursuit of universal health care.

The reality though is a little dim. We are not on track to meet the Sustainable Development Goals, nor have we Closed the Gap. On a global level, major disparity still exists between the developed world and the developing world, where the burden of illness appears to fall on those most unlikely to manage it.

Our healthcare systems are driven by an illness mindset, yet to really have an impact on the social determinants of health we must shift our mindset to one of wellness, prevention and the primary management of care. Non-communicable diseases will continue to burden this century. And for the first time we are considering a world where isolation and loneliness are diseases with chronic and debilitating effects on human capacity, morbidity and mortality.

How can this be in a world that is overpopulated- when deforestation is plaguing our eco system and our oceans are being raided – where we see capitalism, greed, landfill and waste but where millions are facing food scarcity and poverty? Imbalance and uncertainty are all around us, yet you will be required to provide stability and support- to put people at ease as we care for them- just like health professionals have done for hundreds of years before us.

Care delivery is now trauma informed but as health professionals you will need to know how to care for yourself and for each other in a climate of immense pressure, vicarious trauma, relentless demand and facing a worldwide health workforce shortage.

I know this all sounds like doom and gloom but do not despair. I have great hope for our future and for what you will be able to achieve. I have given more than half my life to my profession, my industry, my country and my community and I have loved the opportunity to serve. Yes, there are easier careers, and perhaps even easier money to be made- but that does not translate to happiness, to purpose, to fulfilment or to using your life well. And I couldn't be more honoured than to call myself a nurse.

Every community will need you, some more than others. Whatever your area of interest, you will find a place to work. You will go where the action is, but you should stay where you are loved.

My personal motto is 'dare to be different' and when all is said and done, I would like to be remembered as 'someone who always gave more than she took'. Decide today who you are, what you stand for and what you will not tolerate. I guarantee you will be tested. Take these moments as gifts to grow and evolve.

I have always felt very honoured to be tertiary educated. I am not the child of an entitled or wealthy family. I grew up in Sydney's western suburbs, I am public school educated, and if it weren't for the Whitlam Government policy changes of the day- perhaps my story would have been very different. As a struggling single mother for many years- the two scholarships I received to help towards my master's degree and my Wharton Business School Education were invaluable for my confidence, my self-worth, and my career. In my second year after graduating nursing, I undertook post graduate clinical studies and by my late 20's- and with two sons 3 and 4 years old- I completed my master's in management. Fast forward a few decades and in the past few years I have completed studies at Harvard Business School for Executives, and I have graduated from the Australian Institute of Company Director's Course as well as obtaining Fellowship with them. Why do I share this? Because I hope that you commit to lifelong learning too. Some of it will be formal and accredited, but everyday I see myself as a student in earth school- always open to learning and growing to be my best self.

Embrace change, innovation, digital platforms, and artificial intelligence. Managing the carbon footprint of health consumables is a priority for this graduating class as you will be leading the reform. Global imbalance and geopolitics will continue to see health professionals working in disaster and warzone conditions and the challenge of caring for hundreds of thousands of displaced persons will be a factor for health leaders globally to manage.

We teach people how to treat us and I have made it my mission to teach politicians and power brokers that our voice needs to be heard and our opinion needs to be sought.

Take all opportunities and venture further than you plan. Become an active member of your professional organisations, aspire one day to be Fellows of your respective colleges. Honour the thousands who have gone before you and secured our great respect and regard. And pave the way for those who will come after you.

Being smart is essential, but it is not enough. Be courageous, be kind, be strong, be brave and most importantly be true to yourself and why you chose this degree. Never doubt the contribution you can and will make. Always conduct yourself with pride, professionalism, and integrity. The greatest opportunity for each of us in this challenging world is to use our life well. Expect the best, want the best and deliver the best. When we fly, we feel confident and proud, and our patients flourish as a result.

Our country and our professions are filled with inspiring and dynamic people. Go and find them and go and be them. Congratulations and good luck.

THANK YOU