

Professor Rob Moodie

Graduation Ceremony Speech, Tuesday 31 March, 2009, 10.30AM

Thank you very much Deputy Chancellor for the opportunity of speaking today.

Congratulations to you all on graduating – to your families, friends, supporters and University staff that have helped you through.

And congratulations on graduating in one of the health sciences.

I have a deep sense of gratitude for being allowed to work in health – and I say “allowed” by virtue of the fact that I was in the remedial group in my final year of medicine – given that I hadn’t performed with great distinction early in that year. I was then lucky, or unlucky, enough to be in the Austin Doyle School of Humiliatory Learning. Professor Doyle said “tell me all you know about rheumatoid arthritis Mr Moodie – I am sure its not going to take long!”

I believe we are hugely privileged to work to improve other people’s health.

After all, our health is one of the most cherished assets we have. It is what we care about.

It is also a fundamental human right.

If you ever despair of the human race, read the **Universal declaration of Human Rights**.

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

And it mentions that health is a human right

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services.

We are fortunate that the health sciences are universal – so you have a degree or ticket that can take you across Australia and across the globe. You have a pass, if you wish to use it that can give you a privileged entrée into other people lives and the cultures they enjoy.

I went from the rural Australia at the rustic Albury Base hospital to the American Hospital in Paris in chic Neuilly-sur-Seine, where our job was looking after ageing films stars to working with Save the Children Fund in refugee camps in the Sudan. Here I had to virtually relearn how to be a useful health worker in such a different setting than those in which I had trained here.

Most recently I was teaching health promotion in the MPH course at the Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo, Mozambique. And while I was teaching health promotion in the evenings I was learning (or at least trying to learn) Portuguese in the morning. And even though I learned enough to order a cup of coffee, the joy of learning was enough to turn my grey hair black again.

Working in other cultures will help you understand – it will build a shield against intolerance and discrimination – it will help you be less afraid of the other – it will help you find your common humanity.

You will also discover, if you haven't already done so, that the world is decidedly an unfair place. Which country we live in, and where we fit into the social and economic landscape in that country will most likely have a profound impact on how we live and how healthy we are. Which is all the more reason to work in the health sciences.

If you do get the opportunity to live and work overseas, I would say go for it! And similarly if you get the chance to work in rural or remote Australia, take it. We need you there! Ask Robyn McDermott – we worked in Alice Springs together. Where else can you get the opportunity to be in a theatre restaurant show at the local pizza joint,

play sport, work and learn in Aboriginal health and campaign against nuclear war at the Pine Gap installation?

One question that I hope you will ask of yourself – is how do you make a difference

There are so many issues – from maternal death to malaria to cancers, injuries to TB, HIV, bad backs, birth defects – the list is of course endless..

Which issues are the most important?

Which should you be focussing on?

And what should you do as an individual? What is your place in the firmament?

How do you choose?

You can consider the burden of disease or the burden of cost

Or the inequity of the distribution of the burden and cost

Or how fixable is the problem

But most importantly you might want to think about what is your passion, this can be your guiding light. Your passion like mine may take a while to develop – then let it happen - don't torture yourself, if its not there yet.

I would like to discuss the idea that to be good at improving others health we need to look after our own health.

This of course means looking after our physical health – nutrition and physical activity, but also our mental, emotional or spiritual health. We need to be selfish to be generous.

Last year chef Gabriel Gate and I produced a book called Recipes For A Great life (by the way his name means spoilt in French so the book was written by spoilt and moody)– and it deals with seven aspects of our lives:

Social and family relationships, food and nutrition, our intellectual lives, our cultural lives, , our emotional and spiritual lives, and our physical and work lives.

Just imagine these seven elements of our lives were all jars – and you have a certain number of jelly beans - that represent your time, resources, effort. How do you distribute those jelly beans?

Do you put too much into the work jar perhaps – and not enough into the physical and emotional health? I am convinced that we need to put investment – our own jelly beans of our time, effort and resources - into developing and enhancing our emotional and spiritual lives – in whatever way you choose, whether it is yoga, mediation, prayer, finding your own special place to reflect or by walking the dog.

If you want to be good at caring for other peoples health, start with your own – as I said before you have to be selfish to be generous.

I play touch rugby on Sunday mornings. One of the other players – and they range from 6 to 63 - is a surgeon. One day he asked one of his patients - who was 104 – not a bad innings – about what was the best thing about being 104.

He paused for a moment and said – no peer group pressure!

I wish you great luck in your exciting next steps

And I hope that you will engage with the wonderfully rich and varied country and planet that we happen to be spending our lives on. There are truly great people in every corner of this country and the globe – find them and work with them.

By listening, by being respectful, by learning and by giving we can leave the world as a better place.