

It is an honour and a privilege for me as a former graduate of this magnificent University to be given the opportunity of addressing you this afternoon. I would at the outset like to congratulate all of you on your wonderful achievement. I am certain it has come at great sacrifice but I am also sure it has been worthwhile, because you are entering (or in some cases continuing) in the exciting and passionately rewarding area of health care. All of you will have the opportunity of making a difference to peoples lives! And do not underestimate the significance of this.

I started my working life as a 17 year old at the Adelaide Children's Hospital and I was fortunate enough to be given many opportunities that resulted in me focussing on health management as my career. This has taken both me (and my family) to a country hospital, interstate and overseas in both the public and private sector. The opportunities in the health care profession are unlimited and it is only your commitment and passion that is a pre requisite to create and seize these opportunities.

I seized a lot of opportunities – some were fortuitous but many were through hard work and persistence. I completed all of my undergraduate and post graduate qualifications as a part time student. I constantly looked for opportunities to advance my skill set and was particularly diligent in ensuring my career moves were for all the right reasons

My entire career has been in health care, but I am a mere administrator as opposed to a clinician who is at the real end of the business! My current role is the Chief Executive of St Andrew's Hospital. It is a role that I genuinely love and St Andrew's Hospital is an organisation I am fiercely proud of. At St Andrew's, with the help of people like you, we make a difference to peoples lives.

I would like to read out part of a moving letter I received from a patient who recently spent some time at St Andrew's. I read this out to impress upon you the difference you can make as health professionals. I have spoken to the patient and she was delighted that her feelings could be shared with new graduates.

I was a patient at your hospital recently. I have decided to write to you in detail. I feel the experience warrants for it.

I came in for a removal of a thyroid lump, initially it was thought to be benign and then it turned out to be cancerous. A second surgery was performed within a couple of days and I am doing well now.

We started our journey at the hospital with a lady by the name of Meredith, it was a good start. What unfolded after that is unbelievable.

I had the greatest fortune to be cared for by the same nurse or angel after each surgery at the CCU. I wouldn't be surprised if you said that no such person exists. She tended to me as if I was her 10 year old daughter. I have thought about this over and over again in my head.

Most of us are good people, we have cared for someone in our life, but the truth is, we have cared for a family member, a friend or neighbour. I can't work the mindset of a person who is willing to do it for a complete stranger night after night. Someone extremely special. I am extremely touched by her. I am teary eyed every time I think of her.

My time on the 4th floor ward was a very difficult one. I was in a lot of pain and this was when I had to learn, I had cancer after all. I couldn't have withered this storm without the nurses in that ward. I like to mention a nurse, just after the bad news was broken to me, although I thought that I was handling the news ok, my body wasn't. My blood pressure was sky rocketing, acid forming in my stomach etc. I was in a lot of strife. This nurse put her hands on my head and said "It's a lot to take in love, that's why your body is feeling like that" I want her to know that her empathy and sincere compassion was felt and it meant so much to me.

The stay on the 2nd floor ward was more pleasant. However, pain and discomfort after two surgeries were evident. Once again there was another array of nurses ready for the challenge. They were all so tender and caring. Who in the right mind tells the patient, "don't think twice about ringing the bell, that's what we are here for". There was another older nurse who came in the nights as well. I want her to know that she was an absolute darling. There were some junior trainee nurses. I believe they have the right temperament and being guided by such great senior nurses is a great plus for them.

I want to take this time to say a few words about Dr. Kollias. I am one lucky woman to have fallen into his hands to be treated. He is a great surgeon and a great human being.

I want to be a fair critique. But I am falling short in finding anything negative. All in all I think the Management can take pride in a great Hospital. You have a great team. Guard it with all your might.

My husband and kids join me in thanking you and congratulating you on your efforts.

Fortunately we get a lot of nice letters but to me this one (that also included some more personal comments) made me realise how much of an impact we can make. And indeed, how much of an impact you will make.

At St Andrew's we have an absolute passion for safety and quality and of course this is focussed on the patient. Patients are generally vulnerable and nervous when receiving healthcare and they need and they deserve compassionate, competent caring providers. I believe you all must fit this criteria of a health care provider.

Please now let me briefly indulge you with some details of the private hospital sector and the challenges and opportunities we all face in healthcare.

The private health care sector-

- Has about 25,000 beds across Australia representing about 32% of all hospital beds
- We account for approximately 40% of all admitted patients in Australia, close to 3 million people admitted annually.
- We employ about 50,000 fte and
- We perform 56% of all surgery in Australia.
- 46% of all cardiac bypass operations and 53% of all chemotherapy.

We are a major part of what can only be described as one of the best health care systems in the world. However, the Australian health care system is facing some enormous challenges so we need to get it right! A few of those challenges are;

The ageing population. By the year 2042 the estimated life expectancy of an Australian female is 88 years. Between 2004 and 2031 the population aged 65+ will increase by 90% and by 2012 the number of people aged 65+ will outnumber those aged less than 15 years.

The cost of healthcare. We currently spend about 9% of our GDP on health. This will have to increase as society gets older. In the USA they spend 14% of their GDP on healthcare and it is estimated that 40% of that total spend is on maintaining the last year of a persons life.

The healthcare workforce. As mentioned earlier we have an ageing population and with that comes a decline in the labour participation rate. We will need to ensure we use our workforce effectively and appropriately. We will need to continually review how we provide our service. You are all part of that workforce and will be contributing on how to improve service delivery and maintain the Australian Health Care System as the envy of the world.

Together with these challenges are exciting opportunities in healthcare;

Improved technology, improved diagnostic abilities to detect disease and treat

Improved surgical techniques

Improved pharmaceutical products that can treat and reduce the burden of disease

Improved vaccinations

Significantly improved safety and quality practices

Greater awareness of health morbidity issues

Improved models of care and methods of delivery to name just a few.

In concluding I would reiterate that you have all chosen a career in a truly wonderful profession. I would encourage you to go out there and make a difference. I wish you all every success in your future endeavours.

Congratulations and Thank You.