

Presentation at the University of South Australia Graduation Ceremony

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What does it mean to be successful?

Good afternoon

I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land the Kaurna people and pay my respects to the Elders both past and present.

I would like to express my appreciation to Chancellor, Dr Ian Gould for inviting me to address this graduation ceremony today and I would also like to acknowledge the presence of Pro Chancellor, Mr Terry Evans, Vice Chancellor and President, Professor Peter Høj, Members of Council, Doctors, Emeritus Professors, Fellows and senior management and staff of the University, graduates, ladies and gentlemen.

It is an honour to have been asked to speak to you today, on this important celebratory occasion. The word "honour" often gets a bad rap these days.

For me today however, there is a no more fitting word. I am honoured to stand before the nurses and midwives of the future. I also feel truly honoured to have spent my whole career in a profession which has provided me with so many opportunities and adventures as well as deep connection to others.

If, like me, you choose to spend your whole working life in nursing or midwifery, you will find that with a nursing and/or midwifery degree you quite literally have the world at your feet. There is no end to the versatility of these qualifications and no limit to the places they can take you. Nurses and midwives we can be found in the deepest and darkest – as well as the brightest – corners of every country in the world.

If you do choose to stay in these fields know that you will be partaking in what is quite simply the most important work there is.

This may well be difficult to remember at times. In a world which measures success more in terms of wealth than level of service, and ambition more in terms of status than generosity of spirit, it will surely be tempting to lose sight of the value of the work you do.

You see, the overwhelming majority of nurses and midwives do their work, not because it's glamorous or well paid or even always highly regarded. For the most part, nurses and midwives do what they do because they know it is right, and because they care.

While some of you, again like me, may have “fallen” into nursing or midwifery, I am sure there are many here today for which choosing nursing or midwifery has been a conscious choice. A choice to work not so that you can simply pay the bills or climb ambitious career ladders (although both of these are quite possible with these degrees).

For those of you – perhaps the majority here today, who have chosen nursing or midwifery because you already know the true purpose of work

– to you, I raise my hat. Your decision and achievement should quite rightly be a tremendous source of self respect and pride.

While many of you will choose to stay within nursing and midwifery, a similar number will choose to move in other directions sooner or later. Just as nurses and midwives can be found working in all corners of the world, they are found in every corner of the workplace. There are nurses and midwives working in law, medicine, business, within government, as politicians, and in many other professions.

There is nothing wrong with this. While we continue to have health workforce shortages, we do need as many of you as possible to stay in the professions. It is unrealistic though to think you will all stay, and the fact that nurses and midwives are found successfully working in so many other areas, speaks volumes about both the qualities of those drawn to nursing and midwifery, as well as the values and knowledge you have gained by your tertiary studies.

One certainty is that far from being at the end of your study, in many ways you are only just beginning. Ongoing education is absolutely vital for all professions but particularly in nursing, midwifery and other health fields. We all know that health care is rapidly changing.

Ongoing education is vital not only because health care is changing but also because nursing and midwifery are changing and we are standing at an historic point in the development of our professions both internationally and in Australia.

New policy and legislative changes are meaning that nurses and midwives are finally starting to challenge outdated models of practice, develop new ways of working and push the boundaries of their practice. The future for nursing and midwifery has never looked so bright.

As you probably know, nurses have long rated as the most trusted profession in community surveys, but it is wonderful to witness both nursing and midwifery increasingly recognised and valued by government.

Dag Hammarskjold wrote:

Constant attention by a good nurse may be just as important as a major operation by a surgeon.

Nurses and patients have long known this and increasingly politicians, management and other decision makers are realising it too.

It is also becoming increasingly recognised that high quality health care means more than the fairly rudimentary improvements in biomedical indicators. While these are of course very important, people are recognising that safe, quality care is much more than this. Quality care means true patient centred care and includes continuity and responsiveness of care provider, interpersonal communication, care for family and other measures of holistic care. So much of this is primarily the domain of nursing and midwifery.

Due to the essential nature of the work we do, the size of our professions and the support we have in the community, nurses and

midwives can and should be a very powerful and important voice of change.

Don't underestimate how challenging this will be. It will require nothing less than a continuing reassessment of what it really means to be successful. And this reassessment will require large doses of what are among the most important human qualities.

Awareness, courage, and conviction will be required to question the underlying assumptions which saturate our lives about the meaning of success. Let me repeat what I have learnt – it is in the level of service to others and the quality of our personal and professional relationships where true success is measured.

Congratulations on *your* success this afternoon. May your careers be long and rewarding, and of great benefit.