

## Graduation Address - 30<sup>th</sup> March 2012

Good Afternoon.

I'd like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we today celebrate your graduation.

I'm extremely honored to be invited to address you today, and would like to particularly thank the Chancellor, Dr Ian Gould, the other members of the official party and all the academic and university staff.

Clearly today is about you. All of that hard work, long hours, self doubt, and if your anything like me, sheer panic of getting the assignment that your ignored until the last minute, in on time! Somehow you have all succeeded in balancing study, family, work, money and god forbid a bit of fun.

But relax, you're here, and all of that is now behind you.... Or is it??? As the future of the nursing and midwifery workforce of this country, I suggest your game has just begun!

This wonderful celebration of your success must also be shared with the people who took this journey with you, your parents, partners, friends, colleagues etc. A tough road for them, but I'm sure with absolutely no regrets considering how proud they must be of you today.

Straight from a rural school I undertook my undergraduate Nursing studies here at the University of South Australia, at the Salisbury Campus – now long since gone. (In fact I think its now a bloody great car park on the Main North road?) The education I received was of extremely high quality, broad in its health application, delivered by dynamic motivated educators with a philosophy to ensure we were prepared for a career in the complex world of Australian healthcare.

Following graduation it was clear that UniSA did produce well prepared and educated health professionals, and in my travels I'm amazed to see how many of our alumni are in positions of power and influence, helping to drive a revolution in Australian healthcare.

I won't stand up here and tell you how great the Nursing and Midwifery professions are, if you don't know that, then you're probably sitting in the wrong auditorium, the 10<sup>th</sup> Hellenika music concert is actually next door!

But I will give you some insight into the career that Nursing has facilitated for me, in an attempt to remind you that as professionals, Nurses and Midwives are like Sand at a beach picnic... we get everywhere.

2 Years after my graduation, working as a Remote Area Nurse in Coober Pedy, I found myself at the scene of a bus crash, tending to the school kids, many critically injured. 2 Nurses, 2 volunteer Ambulance Officers and 2 Local Cops, we kept these kids' airways open and managed their traumatic amputations while we waited for up to 10 hours for the last victim to be evacuated.

Not what I thought I'd be doing when I graduated.

As an Aid Worker for the Red Cross, my health skills were key on many occasions to the success of the missions;

- Evacuating the war wounded out of the south of Sudan,
- Supplying surgical equipment & drugs to all health facilities in the rebel republic of Abkhazia whilst under a UN embargo
- Renovating front line first aid posts across the north of Afghanistan during the Taliban insurgency
- Investigating violation of International Humanitarian Law with the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka
- Managing the local staff at the Denpasar hospital morgue following the Bali Bombing
- Providing a situation report following the Tsunami on the North Coast of PNG that claimed 3000 lives
- Being one of the first health response teams into Haiti following the recent horrendous earthquake that killed 300,000 people.

Not what I thought I'd be doing when I graduated.

Not that my nursing career has left me unchallenged in Australia, far from it;

- Being the Director of Nursing of a few hospitals and Aged Care Facilities across SA, VIC and QLD
- Managed the remote Health Services across the NT
- Reporting on the suitability of the conditions for the detainees at Woomera Detention center
- Being the Inaugural CEO of the National Center of Quality in Indigenous PHC

Not what I thought I'd be doing when I graduated.

Currently, I manage the PHC services for the Royal Flying Doctor Service in Cairns, mostly Mental Health and Social & Emotional Wellbeing services to the most remote parts of QLD.

Excitingly I have been able to maintain my clinical skills and do monthly flight nurse retrieval shifts... clinically terrifying for me! But in all honesty, probably more so for the poor doctor and patient!

For the Last 7 Years I have been the National President of CRANApus, the professional Body for healthcare providers in remote Australia. It is with this 'hat on' that I remind you of the huge responsibility that you now carry as healthcare professionals.

People in our own wealthy developed country die twenty years early than the average because of their Indigenous Status. The further away from a capital city to go, the worse your health status is, regardless of education or income.

The disadvantage, lack of health equality, difficulty in health access and ignorance of social justice is a national disgrace, and as a country we should be ashamed.

As Nurses and Midwives we must demand resolution, but must also act. The answers to these issues are complex and long term, and governments can't do it alone.

With the power of the Medical and Pharmaceutical lobby groups, if Nurses and Midwives don't 'pull their fingers out', we will just get more policy based on the same old rhetoric... "we just need to train more

doctors and pay them more”. I don’t need to remind you that as a country we don’t have a shortage of Doctors, merely a mal-distribution, we can’t shift them out of the cities!

Nurses and Midwives on the other hand are more equally distributed regardless of remoteness and are more likely to work amongst the most marginalized. We are the most populous of the health professions and in my opinion grossly under utilized with narrow, prescriptive scopes of practice.

We must generate more robust research is evidence to our critics that the ‘sky won’t fall in’ if nurses and midwives expand their authority, roles and autonomy to address the currently unmet needs of many of our countrymen.

To effect change we need to actively engage in the health debate and start to drive health reform. My boss, Dr Ian Hosegood is often heard saying, “If were not at the table, then we are most likely on the menu!”

To achieve this our professions have to overcome the inherent passivity and internal conflict from which we suffer. We must unite and be not only professionally, but socially responsible.

The challenges you face will be complex, but I believe you are very well prepared as graduates of the university of South Australia to tackle them. This journey will be fun, vivid, human and without exception, incredibly rewarding.

I sincerely look forward to working with you as you grow, change and lead the nursing and midwifery workforce of tomorrow.

Congratulations to each of you on your success, a culmination of a lot of hard work, a caring nature and individual intelligence. Thanks for letting me share this day with you, its been a great honor.

Christopher Cliffe

