

University of South Australia
Graduation Ceremony
27th March 2007
Occasional Address
Associate Professor Susan O'Neill

When I worked at the Royal Marsden Hospital in London doing a post graduate program in cancer nursing, I remember sitting supporting a 35 year old woman as she took her last breath and died from lung cancer, it was 3 o'clock in the morning and she had no family with her.

I remember encouraging a young man 9 years ago to visit a fertility clinic prior to starting his chemotherapy that was going to make him infertile, he now has a 4 year old son

These are examples of the diversity, opportunity and influence you have given to yourselves by completing your study and as a result of that you will make a difference. Because you will be there too, you will have the experiences as well as the people you treat and you too will change as a result. It will be in the really funny times, the very serious times, the incredibly sad times, the intellectually and physically challenging times, the pump that doesn't work, the pain relief that isn't enough, the assessment that changes the treatment, the test diagnosis that makes someone relieved, the learner who learns because you have been able to teach them.

In the new world of virtual everything, blogs, my space, you tube, SMS and internet shopping, banking and email it is becoming more and more difficult to find and experience real human touch, communication and connectivity. Where it can be found and is the essence of practice is in the health sciences. The one thing that we all have in common is that our chosen service is human care, direct, applied or as a support.

The power and influence your study achievement will have on you and other peoples lives is enormous. The diversity in the career path you embark on is only limited by you. Many of you have fulfilled a lifelong dream today. Your family and friends have supported your ambition, drive and focus and so many of them will feel that are also achieving something today.

I am sure when many of you submitted your last assignment you said that you will never study again...but you will. You are an inspirational person, it has been the power of one, you, that has led you here today, no amount of help or support that you may feel you received will ever replace the power of you in achieving your goal.... Today is all about you.

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The collegiality that you have developed during your education is precious. The power of comradeship has pulled you through difficult times and has propelled you towards good times and new experiences. It is the main stay that lifts you up when times are tough. The laughter that is the essence of breaking down so many barriers, reducing stress and allowing renewal will be form the memories that will invigorate and remind you of the specials years that you are now farewelling.

You are the innovation, 492 new and clear sets of eyes that the community are relying on to support and care for them and nurture their families. It's not always easy, no one pretends it to be, you see people when they are vulnerable, perhaps at their lowest ebb. So what makes the professional that you have chosen to be so special within the system that at times, seems mechanical and too fast to deal with the sensitivities of life. It's YOU that makes that difference.

So don't get lost in the system, continue to care, continue to understand the dynamics of the individuals life and the capabilities of people. Try to do this with sympathy, without prejudice, and with cultural sensitivity. Foster understanding and challenge your own beliefs by seeking to understand others, but most importantly continue to learn.

Build on this foundation and continue to fertilise and expand your knowledge, the world of health care is forever changing but you are the link that holds it together. Safe practice is about how you make decisions, share your critical inquiry, theoretical foundation and take accountability.

Be heard ... not because you are the loudest or largest but because nothing will be good enough without you.

As Louis Pasteur once said..... Chance favours the prepared mind
You have developed a whole set of new competencies
Apply your leadership capabilities where ever you are
Seek out & connect with inspiring people
Develop yourself professionally and personally all your life
Be confident and courageous to take risks
You can make a difference
Most importantly....

Be the best you can ever be.