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CURTIN UNIVERSITY

THE FORUM, BENTLEY CAMPUS,

PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

13 February 2017

Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Members of Council and Academic Staff, Graduates, Parents, Partners and friends.

The graduates presented to the Chancellor this evening have been from the Faculty of Health Sciences in Schools of Nursing, Midwifery, Paramedicine and Biomedical Sciences.

I am both humbled and honoured to accept this Honorary Doctor of Science from Curtin University.

Humbled, because I share this graduation ceremony with this evenings graduating classes. Honoured because of my association with this academic institution which has grown in stature over the years, from its beginnings as an Institute of Technology to now, the largest University in Western Australia. A University with an established national and international reputation in teaching and research.

I am privileged to share the ceremony with health disciplines that have been a great part of my professional life as an obstetrician and gynaecologist.

When I first began my medical education, all nursing and midwifery training was hospital based with very little high level academic teaching. It was all practical training of the apprenticeship model.

Paramedics, or ambulance officers as they were known in my day, played a pivotal role in providing emergency care with I might say, little academic rigour but with a sound clinical knowledge base. As recent graduates when rostered in

Casualty, as it was known to us, as a young intern in the RPH Emergency Department, ambulance officer assessment of patients, particularly in trauma cases, was of lifesaving assistance to the fledging doctor. They often knew more than we did and were invaluable in primary treatment.

Now with a structured educational base, Paramedicine is soon to be the 15th Health Care Board to be regulated by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). Such regulation reflects recognition of the importance of paramedic personnel in providing first line treatment in any emergency situation.

The School of Biomedical Services has a reputation for its innovative teaching and research profile. Among these are the high quality education for laboratory medicine and the only oral health therapy course in Western Australia. The available sophisticated programs in molecular genetics biotechnology are the basis for current and future medical practice.

It is without a doubt that nursing and midwifery played a significant role in my professional practice and probably where the greatest change has occurred.

Generations of obstetricians, specialist or general practitioner, were dependent on good quality midwifery nursing care for safe delivery ward practice. When I was training in London, the delivery suite was the midwives' domain. Unless requested or invited by the Senior Midwife

the medical staff were not allowed to enter the delivery suite.

Modernisation and advances in health care technology, changing expectations of people seeking care, and re-organisation of health care systems saw the educational structure for nursing and midwifery change. The dependence on hospital-based training schools declined.

Obstetric sub-specialisation, changes to mode of delivery and increasing Caesarean section rates have contributed to changes in midwifery nursing education and training.

The hospital based training schools became higher education academic programs. Curtin University introduced tertiary nursing and midwifery education in WA decades ago.

However, you should not leave tonight with the idea that those nurses or midwives without tertiary education were any less qualified in caring for the sick or managing women in labour. In fact generations of medical students, trainee registrars and obstetricians, myself included, were ably taught by such nurses and midwives.

We know that the demand for nursing remains high. Projections suggest that such demand will substantively increase. Work force data predicts that by 2025 there will be approximately a 100,000 shortfall in nursing numbers.

Tertiary institutions that provide nursing education must plan and budget for these numbers to avoid or improve on this.

As the first University in Western Australia to undertake tertiary nursing and midwifery education, Curtin must continue to lead the way.

Without well trained and educated nurses and midwives hospitals could not function and safe, effective health care delivery could not be achieved. As popular car bumper stickers aptly said and I quote “nurses you can’t live without them.” Indeed, the same could be said for paramedicine and biomedical science.

You should be proud of your achievements and that your education is badged with the Curtin University reputation and quality. This gives you the best chance in your chosen field.

You will experience a range of opportunities and your professional success will depend on the choices you make. You should stay focussed on working in an area you enjoy and give yourself the best chance of success. While this means hard work, with success you must not be complacent and always look to try to improve particularly, in a constantly changing world of health care delivery.

Ever mindful that there is a community who will depend on you and who can’t live without you. Finding the balance between work and life will present challenges for you. Adjusting your work life balance will be essential. You should not be expected to work to the point of exhaustion like previous generations. This practice is no longer a measure of

your commitment. Attitudes and expectations have changed. Your ability to show compassion requires that you look after yourselves and avoid burn out. What you care about and how much you care about the needs of others requires that you understand yourself.

Parents, Partners and friends have supported you throughout and have been pivotal in your success. I know that this support will continue to be available for you so that your academic success becomes your professional success.

The next exciting phase for Health Sciences at Curtin University is the establishment of the Medical School. I might sound a little biased when I say that this will enhance the already great academic reputation of the University, but similarly the already established high quality research in Health Sciences will bring great support to the Medical School. More often in other institutions, it is the other way around.

The community is grateful for the excellent health care it receives which reflects the quality of your education and the highly regarded qualifications which you have achieved together with the recognition you have received this evening.

I extend my deepest congratulations to you all on your achievements of which you can be justly proud. I know that you are well equipped to make a difference to become the best you can be and confront any challenges that present themselves.