

Graduation Occasional Address

University of South Australia

Ian Olver 25-03-2105

It is my privilege to address you, the graduands on this exciting day. Congratulations; you should be proud of what you have achieved. And I would like to acknowledge with gratitude, on your behalf, those family and friends who supported you through your courses to help you to achieve this day and who now celebrate with you. Next year it will be 40 years since I first graduated in medicine, and what you need to know is that this ceremony although it may be the end of a phase of learning, really marks the beginning of the challenge of translating that learning into practice in the real world, a wonderful journey upon which you are about to embark.

So what reflection can I leave with you today. Many institutions adopt mottos to inspire their students. Melbourne University from which I graduated had a motto which translates to "We will grow in the esteem of future generations" Well, that would be nice. Sydney University where I have worked most recently has a motto that I find quite esoteric, "The stars change but the mind remains the same"

Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne has a very practical motto, "Achievement through learning" about as pragmatic as the Miami Police Department Bomb Squad motto "If you see us running, catch up"

However as a message to you today, I am more taken by the University of Western Australia motto, "Seek wisdom" But even that in my view is not as strong as the motto of my old school in Melbourne, Wesley College which translated to a challenge, "Dare to be wise"

You are about to enter the healing professions where you will daily gain experience which when blended with what you have learned here at this University, with a dash of common sense added, and use of you own insight, will enable you to act wisely. The next phase of your life, and it will be lifelong, may well be characterised as the getting of wisdom, but this should not be passive. You have to seek out experiences, recognise and take opportunities as they arise and challenge yourselves and yes sometime challenge the system in which you find yourselves. You have to dare to gain wisdom.

You have been prepared well by your experience here to meet the challenges that you will face. There is competition, life will not always seem fair. You will broaden the range of people with whom you interact and some will prove more difficult than others. Some will have totally different cultural and personal values to yours. However you must always believe in yourself and put a value on yourself and what you have to contribute. I am not talking about being pompous or arrogant but maintaining a sense of your worth and making sure that you are given the opportunity to live up to your potential.

It is a real privilege to be given the responsibility of caring for others. In practical terms as nurses, you will take the information that you have learned here and you will need to be able to deliver it to your patients with that air of authority that will inspire confidence when they are uncertain or frightened. You will need to develop empathetic relationships with your patients so that they derive comfort from that relationship with you. And if you want my tip on that, just be yourselves and react

and engage as you would naturally to any other person who comes to you in need or with sadness. Don't be afraid to show your humanity.

Increasingly medicine today also requires you to work in teams. You will have to get on with a range of junior and senior colleagues but the rewards come from when a team achieves far greater than the sum of the parts and you can gain great satisfaction from your contribution. And it is here that I should ask you to ensure that as well as caring for your patients, look after your colleagues, be there to support them and accept their support of you when you need it to help you through tough days.

For those of you who want to take up the challenge of research. Good on you. You serve your patients well by seeking evidence for best practice or discovering better treatment methods. For those who teach, you have a special responsibility to pass on your knowledge, your experience; your wisdom. In doing so you honour those who taught you.

I wish each one of you well. I hope you will each find fulfillment in your chosen career. You will get out of it what you contribute to it. Seize opportunities, even if they seem like risks at the time. That's where the daring comes in.

I have to tell you that I did not plan to be here today, when I graduated. Neither did I plan to work in both the US and Australia, Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide, to do 30 years as medical oncologist and then take a role in public policy and public health and now direct a research institute but by being prepared to respond to opportunity I have been rewarded by a richly diverse career.

So my message is this; if you want to go on from here and have an exciting career and a fulfilling life, or as our vice chancellor may express it, live long and prosper, then I encourage you to pursue a wide range of experiences, in short, to dare to be wise.