

University of South Australia Graduation Ceremony

Opening Address Speech Notes for the
Chief Nurse and Midwifery Officer,
Adjunct Associate Professor Lydia Dennett

Good afternoon and thank you to the Chancellor, Mr Jim McDowell for the invitation to provide this address to you this afternoon.

Well this is indeed a very special day for each and every one of you here today, and I would like to firstly provide my acknowledgement of your achievement and congratulate you on this significant milestone in your careers – this day will stand out as one of the best and brightest in your lives for a long time.

I would also like to acknowledge and congratulate your families, loved ones and friends for the support and assistance that they have provided to you during these last few years – they too have experienced moments of elation, along with moments of despair and they too have been subject to the frantic last minute cramming and the emotional rollercoaster that often comes with this level and intensity of study.

There are 2 messages I would like to leave you with today.

The first is about your career going forward.

If you had asked me where I would be today when I first registered as a nurse in the UK, I would not have imagined the things that I have been able to do and the roles that I have had the privilege to experience throughout my career.

I never set out to be the Chief Nurse and Midwifery Officer for South Australia all those many years ago, but what I did set out to do, was to always take advantage of

any and every opportunity that came my way. The other thing I set out to do, was not to wait passively for those opportunities to come to me, but to create opportunities, to pursue them and in some respects to manufacture them.

And in any position I had, whilst I concentrated and gave a 100% of my attention to the job at hand, I was always thinking about what and where my next move would be, and therefore I could lay the right foundations and undertake the right preparation along the way. I was always ready for that next opportunity and had prepared my pathway ahead of time.

For you, the possibilities are limitless and by aligning your career trajectory with your personal beliefs and values, the outcomes for you can only be positive. What will set you apart from others will be your passion, your enthusiasm and excitement, your motivation and inspiration, your willingness to think outside of the square and take risks, your utter persistence and determination and your ability to constantly challenge yourselves as well as others. These are all attributes that your learning experience and life journey to date has instilled within in you and now it is your turn to ignite the flame and to exercise those attributes unremittingly.

However, being a professional carries with it expectations of you as individuals.

Expectations by the clients or customers you serve, expectations by the public more broadly and expectations by your profession. The standards by which you practice cannot be compromised or bargained. Therefore it is up to you to question yourself and those around you when you see those expectations and standards perhaps not being met or maintained. Easy to say, but not always easy to do. But it is my belief that we do not have a choice, because in the words of Chief of Army, Lieutenant General David Morrison “the standard you walk past is the standard you accept”.

Being a professional also requires you to think about your role in society and the expectations of you in that regard. We are fortunate here in South Australia to have such a vibrant and diverse community, but we jointly create that – it doesn't just happen. What we collectively contribute to the community, is what makes the community what it is, so your responsibilities are broader and extend outside of what you might believe to be relevant, but there is a bigger mantle that involves and includes you in your professional capacity. It is the notion of citizenship and each of us has a vital role to play in creating and sustaining our community as well as shaping our future.

The second message I have for you relates to you and your role as a leader.

It will come as no surprise to you that most of us have formed a belief that to succeed we need to compete. There is a commonly accepted notion that success is achieved by attracting and recruiting the brightest men or women, and giving them all the resources and all the power. But the results have not lived up to our expectations. However, communities are now starting to recognise the power of something called social capital. Social capital is the reliance and interdependency that builds trust. Social capital is what gives organisations momentum, and social capital is what makes organisations robust. What does this mean to you and I? It means that time is everything, because social capital compounds with time. So teams that work together longer, get better, because it takes time to develop the trust you need for real honesty and openness. And time is what builds value.

We need to ensure that rivalry is replaced by social capital. Now, is the time for people to motivate each other. We need to redefine leadership as an activity in which conditions are created in which everyone can do their most courageous thinking together.

So what is the relevance of this to you? Well, we know that leaders at all levels are those who speak up, those who contribute to the discussion, those who appear confident and those whose voice is heard. But it takes courage to speak up. It takes courage to interject, to make a comment or express your view. But it is critical to be in the conversation and for others to hear your voice. And whilst what you say may not always hit the mark, in some respects it doesn't matter. As long as you are seen to be a positive contributor to the conversation, you will not be seen as a passive participant.

So my advice to you is to be proactive in creating and building your own support network, a network of colleagues who are your friends, who will work with you to build your confidence, who will allow you to use them as your sounding board, who are supportive of you and who will foster your sense of self-worth and self-confidence. And that's important because not only will it give you the faith and belief in yourself and enable you to participate more meaningfully, but it will also create a fertile breeding ground for the bright ideas to be generated and cultivated. This is social capital at work. And there is no better time because in an era of unprecedented reform, locally, nationally and internationally, we need our current and future leaders to be working together, being courageous in their thinking together and co-creating the vision for the future.

Graduands, the world awaits you.

Thank you.