

SPECIAL FEATURE



Nursing: *Our multigenerational work in progress*

THE 45TH PATRICIA CHOMLEY ORATION WAS DELIVERED BY PROFESSOR TRACEY MCDONALD FRCNA, RSL LIFECARE CHAIR OF AGEING AT THE AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY.

Professor Tracey McDonald shared her insights into Australian nursing and why she considers nursing to be the backbone of health and social care in Australia. She spoke of how nurses are part of something that stretches back centuries:

Our social institution has a history of being central to all people, everywhere, in each stage of life and at all times. Very few professions can make such a claim. Nursing is unique in the way it has always responded to society's requests of us, while also maintaining the passion and commitment each generation of nurses brings to the continued development, relevance and integrity of our work.

Each generation of nurses responds to the challenges and opportunities of their time. The choices past nurses have made, and compromises either accepted or rejected, shaped what nursing became during their time, and what was inherited by subsequent generations, leading to what we currently understand to be 'nursing'. It is sobering to realise that our choices and the strength of our commitment to nursing and its purpose, are already reshaping the

nature of the profession we will hand on to the next generation of Australian nurses.

Professor McDonald spoke of the 19th century beginnings of nursing and the influential nurses of that time. She moved into the 20th century and spoke of nursing during WWII and the move of nursing education into the tertiary sector.

After briefly touching on nursing becoming an academic discipline and how Australian nursing was ahead of its time in regards to implementing competency standards for clinical practice, Professor McDonald discussed problems that started to be revealed in the 1990's as a result of nursing's move to the university sector and the introduction of new categories of health workers in Australia.

Professor McDonald referred to the changes that the 21st century brought with it, which further impacted on Australian nursing. She talked about the identification of a need to prepare for an ageing population and in turn, a need to build the aged care workforce. Professor McDonald also spoke about the establishment of a Commonwealth Chief Nurse position and

the introduction of nurse practitioners into the Australian workforce.

Professor McDonald highlighted the importance for every nurse to search for nursing role models and to think about the people that inspired them to become a nurse:

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My message to nurses assembled here tonight is fairly direct. Look to each other for leadership and don't be fooled by the glamour of prestige and pomp. Recognise each other for the value of what nurses do for people because even if those in positions of authority over us don't really understand it, the general public does. They know how they benefit from nursing care, support and protection. They realise that having competent, connected nurses in their communities brings balance... and they love us for it.

In her conclusion, Professor McDonald challenged the audience by asking:

Will the next generation of nurses thank us for what we have done to our

multigenerational work in progress? The 21st century is a decade old and we need to think about the profession we are shaping with our actions or inactions. The centuries-old narrative of nursing integrity and care for the disadvantaged in our societies has recently been overshadowed

by a culture of managerialism and sustained attacks on our epistemological heritage through the commodification of nursing education. But I am convinced 'nursing care' remains the unifying concept that allows nurses to recognise one another. ■

To read the full text of Professor McDonald's Oration please visit the RCNA website at www.rcna.org.au/scholarships/oration_lectures

1. Tracey delivering her Oration
2. RCNA National Conference delegates
3. Associate Professor Stephanie Fox-Young FRCNA FCN (President of RCNA) presenting Tracey with a gift
4. Debra Cerasa FRCNA FCN (CEO of RCNA) with Tracey