

OCCASIONAL ADDRESS

Professor Jill White

RN, RM, MEd (Syd), PhD (Adelaide), FRCNA, FCNA
President, NSW Nurses and Midwives Board,
Dean, Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery, University of Sydney

Delivered at the UTS graduation ceremony
for graduates from the Faculty of Nursing, Midwifery and Health
Greenhalgh Theatre, Kuring-gai campus, Wednesday 23 April 2008, 2.30pm

Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, my friends at this wonderful University, parents and friends and most especially graduates. What a special day — I love graduations and this one is particularly special as it is first time any University in this state has had a graduation for graduates of both a Bachelor of Nursing and a Bachelor of Midwifery. Thank you for inviting me to be part of this celebration.

Registered Nurses never has there been a time when your entry to the workforce was more eagerly anticipated by your health professional colleagues, never have your hands, minds and hearts been more needed by our communities and never has health service delivery needed your innovation, creativity and critical thinking more in finding new ways to meet health needs and improve health outcomes.

Over many years now I have been personally, professionally and academically interested in change — its creation, management and leadership. How can nursing take an active role in shaping the health care changes we need now and in the future? Well it's funny how so often something comes to you by serendipity. I had been fascinated to watch Maxine McKew over the six months leading up to the November election. On a plane to Broken Hill a couple of weeks ago I took the opportunity to read the book "The Battle for Benelong" by Margot Saville written as she followed Maxine McKew through the campaign. What struck me in reading this daily account was that there were several identifiable elements to this momentous change — only the second time in Australian history that an incumbent PM had lost his seat. The clear messages from this book were that the campaign was: well researched, data supported, strategic and planned in detail; it was "on message" at all times never pulled into other people's issues; it was community focused looking at what the people were saying they wanted; it was engaged, collaborative, inclusive and culturally sensitive and aligned.

When I thought further about this list I realized it described another change I had witnessed over a longer period of time but of much greater magnitude — the rebirth of midwifery in Australia. Please allow me a brief story.....

When I returned to Australia from New Zealand just over ten years ago the title “midwife” was almost extinct, as was the practice of midwives working to the full scope of midwifery practice. But behind the scenes there were a few important stirrings — at St George hospital there was a small group of midwives led by Professor Lesley Barclay — one of the first clinical chairs in Australia, appointed by UTS. This group was quietly achieving their research degrees and researching practice. Shortly after UTS offered this research team a University based home and thus was born what has become the Center for Midwifery, Child and Family Health. The early members of this group may be names that are familiar to many of you — Caroline Homer, Pat Brodie, Nicky Leap, Sally Tracy, Virginia Schmied and Marg Cook. These women were researching the field, using data to support submissions to governments for changes to education, legislation and practice — seizing the “political moment” and targeting it with data, strategy, and detailed planning and they never lost their commitment to or engagement with clinical practice.

UTS too played a significant role in this change process. It was the first to change its name to the inclusive “Nursing, Midwifery and Health” and it introduced the first “Doctorate in Midwifery” in the world. It offered doctoral scholarships to people who have become the leaders in the field. It appointed these fabulous women to the faculty and they became collectively a magnet for midwifery research, education and practice development nationally and internationally. These women took on executive roles in professional bodies and organized the development of practice standards, curriculum standards, accreditation standards, legislative changes, continuing professional competence processes. During this time they remained “on message” — never being drawn into the fights of others, remained engaged, collaborative, inclusive and culturally sensitive and aligned with women who wanted more and better options for birthing. Above all they were always positive and respectful. On your behalf I would like to acknowledge them today: Professor Caroline Homer, Director of the Center for Midwifery, Child and Family Health and President of the NSW Midwives Association; Prof Pat Brodie, President of the Australian College of Midwives, Prof Nicky Leap, International expert practitioner and researcher, Prof Sally Tracy, Prof Cathrine Fowler, Prof Marilyn Foureur, Assoc Prof Deb Davis, Assoc Prof Lin Lock, Joanne Gray, Rachel Smith and Jane Raymond... All midwives of this university, who with their fabulous clinical colleagues have “midwifed” this new program to its birth celebrated today.

UTS is without question the leader in Midwifery research, education, policy and practice development. You the B Mid graduates are the most public outcome of this decade of hard, hard work. You are the pioneers and the ambassadors for your discipline. Congratulations — I impress upon you and equally your Nursing

colleagues, who's discipline is also in need of change but that change involves a greater complexity — look around you, watch carefully and with an open mind

Make your arguments well researched and data driven, be strategic and plan in detail, remain “on message” and don't be diverted into the agendas of others, align with your community and their desires, be engaged, collaborative, inclusive and culturally safe and above all be positive and respectful.

To return to Maxine McKew for a moment, I don't if you remember the look on her face when she entered the hall on election night not claiming victory but thanking those who helped, paying tribute to the community — humble, modest, grateful and JOYFUL. I entreat you to take these two things away: a positive change strategy which works, to tuck in your back pocket for when you need it, and a joy at achievement. In sitting here today you too have scaled mountains — remember that face, that expression and capture that joy yourselves today.

Congratulations. Enjoy the day.