

## Occasional Address

**Royal Exhibition Building, Thursday 25 July 2019, 11.00am**

**Professor Brendan Crabb AC**  
*CEO and Director, Burnet Institute*

Graduands,

It is indeed a great honour for me to speak to you today.

Today is certainly a day to celebrate; to recognise the great personal achievement of getting to this point.

A PhD is special; you should rightly be enormously proud of yourselves.

And what makes today a little more special is that it is a day to be shared, shared with those who have taken the journey with you.... and who, in many instances, can themselves rightfully take some credit for your success.

So I'd like to sincerely congratulate everyone here in the warmest way I can.

And in doing so I would like to share a few thoughts; small things that I've come to regard as important to making the biggest difference you can in life.

The first thought is the only one to remember, it's about the importance of **life-long learning**; I strongly encourage you to not see today as the end of your learning...

Life-long learning promotes humility and wisdom. Humility promotes further receptiveness to knowledge and wisdom fosters better decisions.

Life-long learning is characterised by listening more than talking – an extra special message to all the men out there...

And it is characterised by being genuinely interested in everyone...

Embrace the richness that comes from diversity.

From it comes a keen sense of self-awareness, and an awareness of the strengths of others. This openness to knowledge and ideas from people in a different circumstance to you is key to a successful working life.

It is also – in my view – the most important aspect of leadership; and you are all in one form or another from this day forward, leaders.

**Good leaders - including academics - ask and listen more than they answer and tell**

The second point I would like to stress is the value of your generic skills...

Those of critical thinking, of being able to process and interpret large amounts of information, of communicating effectively and - most especially - of valuing the consensus of experts, more than your own instinct.

These generic skills are why there are a wide array of job prospects out there for you, ones that are different from the specifics of whatever it was you are now expert in.

There are far more options available than a life in academia.

And there's more...

These same generic skills are a powerful antidote to the 'interesting' times we are living in - where the prevailing view on some issue may be very different to what the best available evidence actually says.

One example of such a pervasive myth is that of the state of humanity itself. Clearly there is much pessimism in this regard. But the data says something very different.

Measures for life expectancy, child mortality, extreme poverty, conflict and population growth all show substantial improvement; each year for the last 40 or more.

In fact the stabilising of population growth is driven another myth-busting fact; saving lives leads to *fewer* people!

This is because keeping kids alive - through vaccination for example - drives lower fertility rates. Women have way less children now than they used to because they have confidence that those they do have will most likely survive. This is true, to different degrees, in the developed and developing worlds!

Of course there are major headwinds for humanity, one very big one in the form of rapid global warming, but it is a surprise for many to learn that in a general sense - there has never been a better time to be born.

My point here it is just to highlight how the facts - even huge ones like this - sometimes differ to the prevailing view.

The community needs people with your dispassionate analytical skills to identify and communicate the best available evidence in any particular area. Because it can be hard to find in this fast news cycle, social mediaorientated, advertising-dominated and easily exploited world.

So I leave with this... your generic skills are not just highly portable in a way that will open more doors for you than you can imagine.... you are desperately needed by a wider national and global community to help tell the difference between the facts - as determined by the experts - and the fiction that they so often receive.

So huge and heartfelt congratulations once again and thank you for the honour of speaking to you all on what is a memorable day in all of your lives...

Thank you!

## Vice-Chancellor's Introduction

*Our guest speaker this morning is an authority on one of the world's most problematic diseases, malaria.*

*Professor Brendan Crabb is an infectious disease researcher, whose research group develops and exploits genetic approaches to better understand malaria parasite biology. The main purpose of his group's research is to help prioritise vaccine and drug targets.*

*Early in his career, Professor Crabb graduated with a Bachelor of Science with Honours in Microbiology at the University of Melbourne, and then with a PhD in virology, also at Melbourne. Professor Crabb's interests include addressing barriers to maternal, newborn and child health in the developing world.*

*Professor Crabb has played critical roles in transformative government policy and funding initiatives, including in the generation of the \$20b Medical Research Future Fund. Since 2008, he has been Director and CEO of the Burnet Institute for Medical Research and Public Health. It is a pleasure to invite him to speak today. Please welcome Professor Brendan Crabb.*