

Occasional Address

Royal Exhibition Building, Saturday 27 July 2019, 5.00pm

Professor Sanchia Aranda
CEO, Cancer Council Australia

The Power of Moments

Chancellor, Graduands, Staff, Families and Friends,

It is my honour to talk to you today as you embark on the next phase of your career. I remember my own graduations fondly and how important they also were to those who helped me on the journey and so on your behalf thank you to all those who have helped you get here today and congratulations to you on achieving your goal through graduation.

Today I want to talk about the power of moments. A moment is defined as a brief period of time, however, while moments are short, they are not insignificant. Despite their brevity all of us will remember specific moments in our lives that take on a significance beyond what might be expected. In their book, 'The Power of Moments' Dan and Chip Heath explore why certain brief experiences can jolt us and elevate us and change us. They suggest that brief experiences can indeed change lives. It is possible for a moment to take us from one state to another.

These concepts resonate with me as a health professional and reinforce my long-held belief that we ignore the power of moments at our peril and limit our capacity for therapeutic advantage. I also believe that all professions deal with people at times of stress or crisis where there is equal power for moments to make a difference. Let me give you two examples from nursing.

In his book, *Mom's Marijuana* Dan Shapiro describes his recovery after a bone marrow transplant. After a period of being intensely ill, Dan, a writer, felt ready to write again. As he began to write he spilt his urinal over himself and then described how this immediately took him from hope to utter despair. A nurse came into the room and in a flash cleaned him up. He then felt restored and made human and described how rare it is in life to move so quickly between two such states of being. Sometime later he was moved to thank the nurse and she did not even recall the moment and was embarrassed by his praise. The power of this moment for Dan not only led him to a profound respect for the nursing profession but became a central story in the book on his experience.

This positive moment is contrasted with the experience of a family caregiver I interviewed for a study on patient and family experiences of palliative care. The woman's husband had died about two years before our interview and she had clearly struggled to find her path through grief. While she was able to speak positively about the role of the palliative care team in her husband's final days, her over-riding experience of grief was a fixation on an unfeeling remark made by a nurse during his last hospitalisation. The woman had approached the nurse as her husband was overdue for his pain medication and was beginning to feel uncomfortable. The nurse responded that she would get to him eventually but there were more needy patients to see to first. The failure of this nurse to recognise that for that woman there was only one patient and that he would always be the most important was a

moment on a shift of care that probably saw her provide predominantly exemplary care – but included one moment of thoughtlessness that would go on to be a central part of a difficult grieving experience, a moment unresolved two years later.

As professionals your power to influence the moments of others is beyond measure. You will move through days of difficult situations, competing demands and challenging interactions. I encourage you to never forget that what you say and how you act take on a significance way beyond what might be expected for people facing stress and crisis, whether that is illness, family breakdown or the many other challenges in life. These situations heighten the potential for both good and bad moments in time that may go on to impact the lives of the people with whom you interact. You will not always get it right, no one can expect that. However, never forget that the ordinary and everyday for you is the scary and strange for someone who is ill or encountering difficulty, giving you the potential privilege of making a difference. My hope for you is that the ledger at the end of your career weighs heavily in favour of making positive differences. I wish you every success for your future careers. Enjoy today's celebration of your achievements.

Provost's Introduction

This afternoon we are fortunate to have as guest speaker the CEO of Cancer Council Australia, Professor Sanchia Aranda.

With 40 years' experience in cancer control as clinician, researcher, educator and health-system administrator, Professor Aranda is also past President of the International Society of Nurses in Cancer Care.

From her early career as a Registered Nurse in New Zealand, Professor Aranda specialised in cancer treatment and palliative care, completing a Bachelor of Applied Science, a Master of Nursing and a doctoral thesis in the nurse-patient relationship and psychosocial issues in palliative care.

She has worked predominantly in research and teaching roles since 1989. Her research interests centre on developing an evidence base to enhance supportive care outcomes for people affected by cancer.

Widely published in international health literature, Professor Aranda holds adjunct Professorial appointments at several Australian universities including the University of Melbourne.

It is a pleasure to invite her to speak this afternoon.

Please welcome Professor Sanchia Aranda.