

Occasional Address

Royal Exhibition Building, Tuesday 17th December 2019, 11.00am

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Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences

Firstly I would like to start by acknowledging that we are on the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation who have been custodians of this land for thousands of years, I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging, and all Aboriginal people here today.

Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Deans, members of the Faculty, distinguished guests, and importantly the graduands receiving your degrees and your families, welcome.

Thank you Pro Vice Chancellor, Professor Gregor Kennedy, for your kind introduction.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude, for being invited to give the occasional address today, it has been 11 years and 13 days since I sat there where you are today, eagerly anticipating my graduation from my own PhD. What an honour it is for me to not only witness your graduation, but to deliver the occasional address, I feel so very privileged.

This moment, your graduation is such an important celebration of all of your hard work, it is a significant milestone and a momentous achievement, and I congratulate you all, each and every one of you! But in truth this ceremony is not only for our exceptional graduands today, this moment is also for their families, their loved ones, their friends, their supporters! The completion of your degree marks a great personal accomplishment, that accomplishment is shared by the people who stood by you and who contributed to your success in various ways. I encourage you all to reflect on that support, and on this incredibly important but not always easy journey.

Likewise, this ceremony is important to the teachers, supervisors and mentors who espoused, encouraged and sponsored you throughout your degree. I speak on behalf of all of them when I wish you well in the next stages of your chosen career path. As you leave here today, you leave as our newest freshly minted graduates, our esteemed ambassadors and we trust you will continue to embody the Faculties values; **Collaboration & Teamwork, Compassion, Respect, Integrity and Accountability** in your exciting careers going forward.

Many of you will be familiar with the Charles Dickens story 'A Christmas Carol'. Given the season, I thought I may draw on the inspiration that is of the three ghosts who came to visit Ebenezer Scrouge, the Ghosts of **Past, Present and Yet to come**.

If I may start with that of the past, for many of you, this day is a welcome relief, you may feel as though you are finally here, after dreaming of this moment for so long. But for many of you, if like me, you may feel as though you can't believe you are actually here today. I remember sitting there, thinking 'how did I actually get here' obviously through hard work, courage and determination, but that is not what I mean. It certainly never seemed to be

written in the stars for me. While I indeed grew up always wanting more from myself, from my life, the reality was, I was one of six children, from a single parent and we were poor. Thankfully my mum and older sisters provided love and a strong work ethic, and perhaps that is how I managed to get through, to that day, to graduate, just like you are now. It's remarkable what passion, encouragement and love can do!

I remember when I submitted my PhD thesis, my mum swelled with pride and tears, and while I think she always believed in me, and believed I could do anything...even she surely thought for a moment, how did she get there, despite those odds! Because the sad truth is, she never thought she was worth anything, never enough to do anything meaningful, just a mother. This broke my heart to think how someone can't see their own worth, especially someone who meant the world to me. In my acknowledgements for my PhD thesis I wrote "Thank you Mum, my number one fan, for all of your love, pride, and all that you have given me, so much of this is for you." And it really truly was!

I recently had the privilege of hearing from the amazing feminist, journalist, and social political activist Gloria Steinem talk and she described a similar moment, where she had the realisation that she was living the un-lived life of her mother. It's incredible to think about the varied backgrounds of the 500+ graduands here today, you too may be living the un-lived life of your mother, or father or grandparent or someone very important to you, and you may not even realise it.

If I may draw on now inspiration from the Ghost of the present, there is also another life, that you may not of thought of yet, but that your graduation today is imperative. This other life you may have great impact or may even save! Yesterday marks eight years to the day, that my beautiful son was taken from my arms by incredible surgeons at the Royal Children's Hospital, less than 3 kms away from where we are today. My son was sadly born with a deadly heart defect, the plumbing of his heart was back to front and his little heart as it was could not sustain life. Incredibly the surgery that would save my sons life, was only developed 25 years before. Countless scientific and medical specialists had experimented, trialled and thought about the best way to overcome this heart defect. It is mind-blowing to think that our graduands standing here, join in these noble pursuits today with the incredible potential to have great impact. Allowing those like my son to sit here with us today.

And lastly now, I want to draw on the Ghost of what is Yet to Come in my final message to you, our valued graduands today, you are the leaders of tomorrow, this is both an exciting and important responsibility. As our future leaders, in addition to your pursuit of excellence in your future careers, it is also up to you to improve this world, embracing and celebrating diversity, working towards a discrimination free environment where a person's gender, culture, disability or health issues, sexual orientation or sexuality should not be a barrier to **reaching their full potential** and having **impact** in our world. A world where equality and excellence go hand in hand. I implore you to do everything in your power to ensure this is a true reality of the future.

I wish you all success as you go forward today in your chosen pursuits.

Enjoy this moment and the celebrations that may continue, this is your moment, you deserve this and all that is yet to come.

Vice-Chancellor's Introduction

Today the University welcomes Associate Professor Natalie Hannan as guest speaker.

Natalie leads the Therapeutics Discovery and Vascular Function Group, within the Translational Obstetrics Group at the Mercy Hospital for Women, University of Melbourne. She is passionate about developing new approaches to combat major complications of pregnancy, especially preeclampsia. Natalie's research is focused on developing therapeutic strategies that are safe in pregnancy, and novel approaches to deliver therapies directly to the placenta. Her pre-clinical research has led to a number of clinical trials both internationally and nationally.

Natalie has a strong research profile with over 80 peer-reviewed publications in international journals. She is well known for her passion to communicate research to the public. As Associate Dean for Diversity and Inclusion, and a VESKI 'Inspiring Women' Fellow, Natalie is a staunch ambassador for Women in STEM and believes strongly in a diverse and discrimination free workplace, where gender, sexuality and sexual orientation, disability and background should not be a barrier to individuals' reaching their full potential.

Please join me in welcoming Natalie Hannan.