

SPEECH FOR  
NURSES' GRADUATION

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"Dedication"

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EXODUS 20 - 9

And the Lord said, "Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God. In it thou shalt not do any work." This commandment makes the rest conditional upon the work done. Simply, we have to work to earn the rest. This is an age old problem.

We hear many complaints about the effort of the individual, whether it be in the field of labor, industry, or the professions. Although my remarks will deal mostly with our chosen field, Medicine, I feel that the principles involved apply to everyone, no matter what field of endeavour they are engaged in.

Scientific advances have been going on at a rapid rate, but the individual as a moral or ethical human being has not kept pace and is lagging in other aspects as well.

What is our ultimate aim in life? To get happiness, whether it be at home, at work or at play. If the desire to attain this end were attempted by acquiring wealth or power, the desire could never be fulfilled. These acquisitions feed on themselves, the more one has, the more one wants. But to do an honest day's work or to spend time improving oneself, is a desire that can be fulfilled by everyone. We are all human beings, hence not perfect, there is room for improvement in all of us, so this attempt can nearly always be successful.

It is true that we all have different capabilities, different capacities and different opportunities, but this should not be used as an excuse for lack of effort. There are opportunities in every field of endeavour.

It is our attitude to what we are doing which is most important. Dedicated people do not complain about the work to be done but about the lack of time to accomplish what they would like to do.

We who practice medicine, whether it be as nurse or doctor, orderly or maid, social worker or research scientist, should be dedicated individuals. It is expected of us and is part of our heritage. We are all in a relay race. The baton is handed to us by our predecessors, who have built the past. We run with it in the present and then hand it on to our successors for the future.

In the past, we heard a lot about dedication, now we hear too much about the lack of it. What do we mean by dedication? To me it means, "devotion to an ideal and the constant pursuit of its attainment."

In our field of work we have a rare opportunity of communicating with the minds and emotions of people - patients and colleagues and all the life processes that go with it. At this stage of my career I value greatly the opportunity of being able to communicate with you in a personal way.

It is a great privilege to be a doctor or nurse, and we should take stock of ourselves and appreciate those before us who helped us attain our professional positions.

The practice of medicine has changed and is changing at a very rapid rate; with this movement there is a great tendency for young people to discard the past. To do this makes one feel that his accomplishments were due entirely to his own efforts and so build his own ego and conceit. Our teachers had great qualities which we are in danger of losing. They did not have all the services that are available today. They had to depend upon their God given senses -- hands for delicate touch -- ears for sensitive hearing -- eyes for fine observation -- a mouth for proper expression -- and a heart to feel with. Today we have machines to make observations for us and reams of voluminous reports to record these observations.

Most of our teachers had a classical education and could express themselves clearly in a simple language so that readers or listeners got an accurate picture of their intended meaning.

You have all seen how a shrewd and accurate observation has saved a patient an operation and many days of hospitalization.

Sure we had to study and I hope use a certain amount of intelligence, but we had to learn to listen, see, feel, and sense all the surroundings. Then we had to learn to express ourselves properly. Eyes, ears, hands and heart, -- when all these are developed you get the greatest satisfaction that any human can get in any field of endeavour.

We express ourselves in many ways and not always with the spoken word. A shake of the head, a shrug of the shoulders, a change of facial expression. Very often silent communications are more expressive than the spoken word.

The written word is very often confusing, especially when numerous abbreviations are used. They are only shortcuts to confusion.

No two people hear with the same ears, nor see with the same eyes.



When any one of us, on account of our profession, communicates with the public, we speak not only for ourselves but for the profession as well. We are a special part of society and are judged by our personal behaviour as well as our medical ability. We are all independent free lance workers. That is why we chose our profession, but this freedom of thought carries with it responsibility and purpose. The public likes to generalize but we don't and can't. We know that no two people are alike. We do not prophesy, but have to learn to anticipate. The public now is very interested in medical news. So it is important that the answers come from qualified sources and not from people who are looking for cheap publicity.

### Patients

We must be careful in our use of expressions to patients, and anticipate how they will interpret what we said. In obstetrics we use terms like labour pain, rupture of the bag of waters, haemorrhage, breaking a breech, stitches, shots, lacerations, floating head, sit on a patient, section her, try pit, burying a deep suture to fill a dead space. All these words can mean something to us, but can also frighten the daylights out of a patient. In gynaecology we use a lot of phrases that are frightening as well. Mostly they deal with food -- cyst like an orange, grapefruit -- fibroids like potatoes, or a watermelon. We must give the patient a chance to understand and be understood. It may take a long time, but impatience is sensed very quickly. She cannot be assured unless you have listened.

Where you stand in a room is important. If you are at the foot of the bed it is difficult for the patient to talk to you. Better be at her side.

In our profession we must have an intensity of desire and determination to follow our star. There are numerous opportunities today for young people with education to climb up the ladder, but they must work to attain their ends. Ambition is great, but it requires dedication to study and work. There must be an urge for energetic doing something definite. Success and fame are by-products of dedication, not a goal in itself. Happiness of successful achievement is more important than having status symbols like wall to wall carpets, several cars, or memberships in fancy clubs. You want to be the best, not look the best nor sound the best, and not use a bulldozer to get there.

Do not expect a great deal for nothing. King Lear said, "Nothing will come of nothing." If you value day to day comforts more highly than attainment of purpose, you are bound to be unhappy. You must have will and determination. The Norse Crest, "Either I will find a way or make one" is very meaningful. Resolutions without action make you sick. Do not listen to "It can't be done."

The pursuit of knowledge is lifelong, it is a perpetual source of satisfaction. You learn from books, experience of your own and that of others. Successful people are willing to seek advice and help. Do not be ashamed of it. In Coriolanus, General Titus Lartius said, "He would lean on one crutch and fight with the other rather than stay behind."



Conceit is a foolish belief in one's ability or power. It is noisy like an empty can. Marius Cato when asked why he did not have a statue said, "I'd rather be asked why I did not have one than why I had one."

Do not be satisfied with mediocrity. Have the satisfaction of knowing that you did your best.

I have worked in quite a few institutions and have come in contact intimately with many dedicated people. Doctors like Bazin, Lafleur, Finley, Gordon, Mendel, Ratner, Little, De Lee; nurses like Livingstone, Holt, Webster, Carmen, MacKenzie, were all dedicated people. Although most of them are dead now, they are still living in the hearts of men and women. What did they have in common, that made them stand out above the common herd? What was the common denominator? They were all dignified human beings with an unquestioned loyalty to their institutions. They could have had higher salaries and made more money if they had wanted to work elsewhere or work in a different manner. Such an idea would never have occurred to them. It would have been unthinkable in their loyalty. They were all humble people with an inner sense of humility to God and man. They all derived satisfaction and great happiness out of their work. There is no question that they were dedicated people, but what kind of dedication did they have?

In the field of medicine as in other fields we find three types of dedication. The first type is the person who is dedicated mostly to himself or herself and sometimes only in that way. All the efforts of the individual are geared towards self-aggrandisement, be it economic, social or professional. They earn money, and sometimes lots of it; they acquire temporary social prestige and even medical notoriety. This approach is egotistical, contributes very little to their institution and even less to the profession. It leads to mediocrity. It is vulgar and dishonest to tell a person or patient that he is of prime importance and then make him fit in with one's own plans. We are constantly besieged by misrepresentation by sight and sound, on radio and television. "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." This attitude may be condoned in labor and industry, and it should not; but never in the practice of Medicine.

The second type is devoted mainly to the profession. These individuals always talk of higher standards, they want to try everything and are constantly making changes. They write many orders and have voluminous records, always thinking that they are trying to raise the standards of the profession. They can make the practice of Medicine prohibitive, and in the process may forget that we are taking care of people who are human beings like you and I. To be different is good only if it is an improvement, but one must be sure it is an improvement. In Medicine, we are dealing with people's lives, not women's dresses.

Then we come to the third type, who is devoted to the idea and ideal of getting the patient well. All considerations are directed to the welfare of the patient. This individual has the advantages of the other types but does not know it. In ministering to the sick in this manner they are honest with the patient, loyal to their institutions, and help to raise the level and the dignity of the profession. Working in this manner, they raise themselves to greater heights. This is the type of work the dedicated doctors and nurses carried out.

In family life we see many mothers who get a lot of pleasure out of living. They are dedicated to their family. Some carry on with a career outside the family circle. The dedicated mother gets her work done while her sister is busy talking, probably on the phone, about how much she has to do. The dedicated mother has struck a balance between her responsibilities and her effort. She gets pleasure out of living and does not need a tranquilizer. This woman is probably the greatest example of dedication.

We can always judge a man by the work he does. The Tissue Committees in the hospitals check the operations a surgeon does, making sure they are justified and well documented. Similar committees could be used in other departments and professions with great benefit.

The consumer is very ignorant whether it be in a doctor's consulting room, a hospital bed, a lawyer's office, or a shop. It is the integrity of the seller which determines the honesty of the transaction.

A person may hide himself from you or misrepresent himself to you in every other way, but he cannot hide in his work. It is too evident. Work is not punishment. The lack of it causes deterioration. Some people invent tricks to get so-called happiness through doing nothing. This is a very empty satisfaction. Dr. Cameron calls this, "An asinine belief, that not to work, is to enter into bliss." I call it a creed for weaklings.

Work well done is our means of earning bread, and gives dignity to life -- provides satisfaction and makes leisure meaningful.

Every job has its dignity. One must use imagination to become creative, and one must try to know more every day. The true craftsman does not affect mannerisms. He does not need them.

By combining curiosity with experience, and knowledge with experiment, one attains the only solid satisfaction given to human beings -- "the happiness of endless attaining."

To pursue education, beyond the necessities of the job, makes the difference between mediocrity and genius.

With Longfellow:--

"The heights by great men reached and kept  
Were not attained by sudden flight.  
But they, while their companions slept  
Were toiling upward in the night.

"Lives of great men all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime  
And departing leave behind us  
Footprints on the sands of time."