

Keynote Address at the Graduation & Nursing Pinning Ceremony of the Class of 2014

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Dean School of Community Health and Policy, Dr. Kim Sydnor, Interim Director of the Nursing Program, Dr. Mamie Montague in absentia, faculty and staff of the school of community health and policy, graduating students, friends and family – Greetings!

I feel honored to speak here today at the nursing pinning ceremony of the Class of 2014. I will like to begin by saying congratulations to you, class of 2014! You deserve that round of applause. I know it has not been an easy journey because, as you might have suspected by now, I've been there! You have gone through a tedious academic and professional journey, one that can only be successfully completed through hard work, diligence and determination. The nursing curriculum is a very intense and elaborate curriculum. Yet, through thick and thin and throughout its joy and the challenges, you did it anyway! So I say good job, and congratulations!

Here we are today at your pinning. The nursing pinning is a solemn occasion dated as far back as the 12th century when the Knight Hospitallers were honored with a Maltese pin for caring for injured soldiers; back to 1860 when Florence Nightingale was honored with the Red Cross pin for the great nursing work she did in the war in Crimea; and back to 1880 when a class of nurses at the Bellevue Hospital School of Nursing in New York were the first to be pinned on graduation. So, class of 2014, this is your time. It is an occasion to honor you also, for the successful completion of the first and major part of your education as professional nurses. This ceremony is a rite of passage to symbolize where you went, and to declare with you, your readiness and passage into the world to care for humanity in a professional manner. Every time you wear the pin, you remember the faculty, the staff and your colleagues of the Morgan State University nursing program that were part of your journey and your professional life story. The pin reminds you that, from now on, your mission is three-in-one - to care, to advocate and to lead. In other words, you are now a care provider to your patients, an advocate for your clients, and a leader in any setting you might find yourself.

Now that you have scaled one big hurdle, you would be looking forward to taking your Board exams and making progress in your professional career. My prayer and prediction for you are that you will pass your Board exams soon and you will make great progress in life. In the meantime, I would like to share a few thoughts with you as you move on from here. My thoughts for you today are centered on your three-in-one mission of caring, advocating and leading.

There is no doubt that Morgan State University has imparted in you a broad range of the art and science of caring through its intense nursing curriculum. And, because of the broad nursing knowledge, proficient caring skills and professional caring attitude that you have acquired through this school, your patients and their families are the better for it. The country and the world are the better for it. So, now, you should go into the world as nurses who truly care. Not as those who are in it solely for the money, but as those whose sense of caring is saturated with genuine love, selflessness and compassion.

Note, however, that caring begins with caring for yourself. If you do not take care of yourself physically, emotionally and spiritually, chances are that you will neither be able to care for others optimally nor be able to do so for too long. Consequently, you will also increase your chances of morbid stress and burnout. In fact, as Arianna Huffington, the Editor-in-Chief of the Huffington Post, in her new book titled, "Thrive: The Third Metric to Redefining Success..." has strongly submitted, success without well-being is not really success. In that book, Arianna philosophized that the dimensions of success should not be limited to money and power but rather should include the third dimension, which she identified as giving, wisdom, wonder, and well-being (Huffington, 2014). So, class of 2014, pay attention to your well-being; take care of yourself even as you take care of others. Pay attention to your nutrition, recreation, rest, sleep, regular exercise, praying, meditating and whatever else you need to do to optimize your wellbeing. Also, detox yourself from technology on a regular basis. In this age of explosive social media, it is easy to get addicted to your TV remote control and your iPhones. It is easy to get habituated to checking your email and text messages hundreds of times a day. It is easy to get engulfed with Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp, LinkedIn, Google-Plus, Tumblr, VK, Flickr, MySpace, Meetup, and Meetme (Did I cover them all? I'm sure I did not!). On a serious note, if you are not careful you will be habituated to them at best or addicted to them at worst. If you allow that to happen, not only would you discover that your precious time is being squandered, your mind and spirit may also be denied of the true rest and quiet they need for wellbeing. So, Class of 2014, I urge you to make deliberate efforts to unplug from them from time to time. That would be part of caring for yourself and your wellbeing.

Now, when you care for your patients, do so with diligence, professionalism, and humility. Attend to them with respect and without being judgmental. Listen and remember that many times you will need to listen more than you need to talk. You will be surprised that you can learn from your patients as much as they from you, if you truly listen. And what you learn from them may be the very information you need to provide the best care for them and for others in similar situations.

Remember, trust and honesty will foster your relationship with your clients. You are entering a profession that has ranked first, with 81%, in Honesty and Ethics in the last 11 years of Gallup polls. It is interesting that in those same polls, members of congress, car salesmen and lobbyists have ranked the lowest with about 8%. So, class of 2014, as you care for your patients, remember that your patients are counting on your trust and your honesty.

You must also be aware that the world is becoming a smaller community every day. Technology, communication and modern means of travel are creating tremendous social and cultural diversity and diffusionism. You will find that both your clientele and professional colleagues are increasingly diverse in age, sexual orientation, class, race and language. In your caring, you must be sensitive and respectful of difference and diversity. You must be prepared to leverage and maximize the advantages of whatever forms of diversity you find in your professional environments.

Apart from caring, advocacy is the second component of your newly acquired mission as you take this rite of passage with your nursing pin today. You must remember that your duty to your client is not that of a law enforcement agent or prosecutor but rather an informed and caring advocate. Apart from their family, you might as well be the closest and most trusted person in the eyes of your clients. That is why they have poured their hearts to you and shared with you their most pressing needs, greatest fears and highest aspirations. Thus, your proximity to your clients gives you those privileges. However in life, for every measure of privilege comes an equal measure of responsibility and accountability. Therefore, be ready to use all data and

information you gain from and about the patient responsibly and maximally for their interest, their care and their advocacy. Share your patients' information with the appropriate persons, at the appropriate times, in the appropriate manner, having the patients' utmost interest in mind as you do so. You must advocate for the best for your patients at all times.

Finally, the third component of your three-in-one mission that today's nursing pinning and rite of passage entrusts upon you, in my humble opinion, is leadership. If you have not thought about yourself as a leader before now, you better start right now because that is exactly who you are. Every one of you, once you have become a professional nurse, you have become a leader, in whatever setting and position you find yourself. Even though your mission is to care and to advocate, it is also to lead. You can only be the best care-provider and the best advocate if you also see yourself as a leader and strive to demonstrate required leadership qualities in any organization in which your work. Class of 2014, determine from now, that you will strive to be a leader. Not just a leader, a good leader, a transformational leader.

How do you do that, you may ask? There is no one exclusive way of becoming a transformational leader. However, I will like to leave you with the following suggestions. Begin by finding yourself a mentor in the profession. A mentor is that experienced person who can guide a less experienced person to become more effective and successful. The mentor encourages, nurtures, instructs and inspires the mentee. Research studies have shown that, on the average, individuals who have been mentored have increased job satisfaction, higher salaries, enhanced self-esteem, increased confidence, greater opportunities for promotion and advancement, enhanced role socialization, and a definitive career plan (Grindell, 2003). Therefore, I encourage you, as you traverse your professional journey, observe leaders you come across and select one that you consider is likely to be able, willing and ready to mentor you to become a transformational leader as he or she is. Once you become a transformational leader, please be prepared to mentor others coming behind you.

To be a good leader, you must know your stuff. That implies continuing education. As a professional nurse, learning must not end at graduation and pinning. Learning is for life. You can only broaden and strengthen your practice and leadership by continuing your education. That is the surest way to ensure best practice and evidence-based practice. It is the surest way to be a confident, reliable, respectable and effective leader. So, make time to read journals and books, listen to the news, go to conferences, get an advanced education. You will better your career prospects, broaden your horizon, and be respected as a leader within and outside of the nursing profession.

Networking is also a good means of becoming a good leader. Networking means interacting with others in and outside of your profession with the central purpose of sharing ideas, advices, experiences and information. Networking usually provides a fertile platform for meeting people who can contribute to your professional growth and development. So join professional organizations, attend their meetings and conferences and participate actively in them as much as possible. It will broaden your leadership experience.

Develop a high self esteem for yourself. That is not an invitation to be arrogant or cocky. Neither does it mean you will no longer make a mistake and become perfect; no one is. Rather, it is to have a high regard for yourself through the development of authentic capacity, performance and competency. So, nurture your potentials and believe in yourself. If you do not believe in yourself, why must others believe in you? On the other hand, you as a good leader must also develop a high self esteem in your followers. Believe in them, encourage them and empower them. You can transform the other person through your expectation of them.

Class of 2014, I encourage you to be trustworthy. To be a good leader, others must be able to trust you. Some leader behaviors that will help others to trust you are sincerity, honesty, consistency, dependability, communication that is open, accurate, and timely, competency in your decision making, mutual goal-setting, and empowerment of your followers. You must trust your followers too. Otherwise, why must they trust you if you don't trust them?

Finally, I will like to share with you the ten most pressing issues or questions that nurse leaders all over the world are currently thinking about (Sigma Theta Tau International, 2011). I encourage you too to start to think about them from now on:

1. How can we optimize evidence-based practice?
2. How can we leverage the increasing impact of technology on nursing?
3. How best can we implement the process of making the Bachelor's degree the minimum entry level into nursing practice?
4. How can we optimize the different roles of the DNP and PhD nursing degree holders?
5. How can we ensure that many more nurses get a seat on the various health-related Boards and other policy tables?
6. How can we cope with the growing ethical demands of practice?
7. How can we improve the quality of nursing workplace culture?
8. How can we develop many more transformational leaders in our profession?
9. How can we cope with the workforce age gap that is widening?
10. How can we make the profession as diverse as the population for which we care?

Those are meaningful questions. As someone who may be interested in the clinical, administration, educational, or research area of nursing, begin to think about ideas that can help us confront any of those issues. More importantly, I invite you to think about them because I personally already see you as an actual or potential nurse leader.

Thank you so much for listening and once again, congratulations!

References:

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