

Cathy Crowe's remarks on receiving an Honorary Bachelor Degree in Applied Studies from Humber College

June 21, 2012

Thank you President Davies, Dean Powell, Associate Dean Sheila West-Merker, faculty and the Board of Governors. More importantly, I want to thank all of you, Humber graduates.

I believe this honorary degree is a true sign of Humber's endorsement of social justice work.

Social justice is embedded in your studies; it is a value of social equality, human rights and recognition of the dignity of every human being.

As graduates from the School of Health Sciences, at the end of the day, you will be doing social justice work.

You are about to become the new professionals that will:

- Care for infants and children, helping to open the world to their little minds, hands and feet;
- Support both children and adults with special needs who will have more chances to blossom under your care;
- Provide restorative care, including hands on treatments and teachings to individuals who will never forget your healing touch and attention;
- Ensure safe treatment with pharmaceutical modalities;
- Assess, counsel, triage and connect people in crisis to the appropriate emergency services;
- Respond to medical and traumatic emergencies;
- Nurse, care and support fragile individuals and families as they experience a health scare;

Humber graduates, you are ***'leaving ready, and you will help many'***.

You and I have a lot in common. We have chosen careers that involve caring, helping and supporting.

My career was maybe a little unorthodox. I began as a cardiology nurse, working on the first 'step-down' unit in the country, where expensive new cardiac treatments were tested and where nurses like me wore a pager and were members of the hospital-wide cardiac arrest team.

Fast forward to my work as a Street Nurse, where the work mirrors work in refugee camps, except it's here in Canada. Dealing with the resurgence of old diseases like tuberculosis, emerging issues like climate change, the return of old plagues such as bedbugs, and ultimately an epidemic of homeless deaths.

My career as a nurse quickly went from relying on the latest technology to carrying my black outreach knapsack, filled with bandages, socks, granola bars and duct tape.

Throughout my 40 year career, I have had the privilege of working with, and learning from, many people in every one of your professions.

One of the advantages of the careers that you have chosen is that your services will always be needed. Your work and your career will deeply and directly touch many people's lives.

That alone, however, might not make you feel like a social justice worker. But given the reality of today's political climate and economy, I don't think you will have much choice, you will also become a fighter for social justice.

The reality is that you are beginning your career in a climate of austerity and cutbacks to social spending. You might feel, at times, like you are banging your head against the wall, as you will see growing privatization of services and a growing reliance on the charitable and volunteer sector.

But you are leaving Humber ready, and you will help many.

To care for one is to care for many. To help one is to help many. To stand up for one is to stand up for many.

Your career is about to begin and you will do your own thing, but I do have some simple advice to share with you. It all comes down to this.

First, I know you've studied a lot of theory and you've written many papers and exams. But for all of you, your future work must come from your heart. Heart is justice. The most important way you can help someone is to be kind to them, to help them get what they need and to show them that you care.

Second, look upstream to keep track of the bigger picture and insert yourself in some way as active and engaged professionals on the issues that you see. That can take many forms: following the news, using social media, voting, supporting various petitions and the campaigns on issues that you care about, and donating to projects that matter to you.

Third, have fun. Celebrate even the small victories and celebrate others who do that hard work with you.

I want to end by honouring you. Thank you for the work you are about to do.

Good Luck and congratulations!!!