

125 Years Celebration

FIJI SCHOOL OF MEDICINE GRADUATION CEREMONY 5/12/80

The Fiji School of Medicine has established an extraordinary reputation since its foundation more than ninety years ago. In that time it has served not only Fiji but the South Pacific as a whole. The School was practising regionalism before that term ever became fashionable and long before its sister institutions, the universities, were dreamed of. Ten years ago, at the time of Fiji's Independence, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara said: "Through the Fiji School of Medicine we have trained men who have become leaders in nearly every country of the South Pacific". The School's contribution to Fiji and to the region as a whole has been immense.

I am sure that those of you who are graduating today are very well aware of this tradition of service which you have behind you. I offer you my warmest congratulations on this happy day.

The only remaining trauma, probably more physical than mental, which you must endure, before being set loose on the world fully qualified in your fields, is to receive well-intentioned words of advice at this ceremony.

For my part, I shall not so much proffer advice as ask you some questions about the role you see for yourselves in the health services of your countries and, indeed, the role you see for the health services themselves. I do so, of course, as a layman, but as one who fervently believes that the patient, be he a person or a community, has a right to be heard. But if you wish in the end not to take my remarks too seriously you may justify that by remembering that by profession I am just a diplomat. And a diplomat was recently described by Peter Ustinov as "nothing but a head waiter who is allowed to sit down occasionally". I am not allowed to sit down yet.

The question I want to put to you is whether the technological advances of medical science have made health services more or less responsive to present needs. With higher living standards and higher levels of education the level and urgency of expectation in the health field, as in many others, seems to be rising faster than the capacity of health services to meet it. Dramatic advances in medical science are universally known to have occurred in recent years. But it is also known that those advances have done little to meet the real health needs of the masses of the world's people. Sophisticated centralised facilities seem to attract the bulk of the financial resources available for health generally, and the best of the human resources, too.

In a recent speech to the Fifth Commonwealth Medical Conference, held in New Zealand, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Sonny Ramphal, expressed similar thoughts very emphatically. He said, and I quote:

"It is becoming increasingly clear that health care for all will not be achieved by mere adherence to orthodox approaches ... New approaches rather than new knowledge are likely to be required — greater flexibility, adaptability, independence of thought and innovation than has perhaps been customary in the past."

We seem to me to be in a curious situation. On the one hand medical science is becoming more advanced and its practitioners are required to become increasingly highly specialised scientists and technicians, while on the other hand those involved in medicine and health services face increasingly difficult social, even political, choices. You, too, in the next few years will face similar choices. Even the career decisions that many of you will be making may very well be relevant to the long-term planning of your health services. Meanwhile you will feel you deserve to relax a little. You may even find time to pursue interests in other fields. This will be important because your technical qualifications may not be the complete answer — they are the base on which you can build. I believe it was well said that when you understand all about the atmosphere and all about the rotation of the earth you may still miss the radiance of the sunset. In your case the radiance of the sunset is, of course, the enviable opportunity you have, with your qualifications, to make a measurable impact in the well-being of your people.

It may sound as if I am urging you to rush into political argument about the best use of health resources the moment you have graduated. That would involve a *total* takeover of newspaper correspondence columns by the medical profession and I don't think the Minister of Health, for one, would approve. And that is certainly not my intention. In fact, in Tuvalu only last week I asked one of the country's leading politicians and a graduate of this School what he thought I should say to you. He quickly replied "Tell them to keep out of politics until they get out of medicine".

But he would agree, I'm sure, that no responsible graduate of this School can avoid considering the immense challenges facing health services in the world today. Before leaving the subject let me leave

you with some thoughts of a distinguished Professor of Medicine from Africa. He said:

"The inevitable facts of history — and the example of the pattern of health services in developed countries — have influenced the planning and development of health care systems in the developing world. But history and common experience have also shown that the established systems are not satisfactory — even for the developed nations — and are decidedly inappropriate for the developing countries. What is needed is courage to break away from conventional concepts — and imagination to plan a system that is both realistic and relevant to the needs of developing countries. Much of the criticism that has been levelled against medicine and doctors stems from failure to adapt standards and criteria to local conditions. Aggressive application of health technology, merely because it is new, has become fashionable; and yet in terms of health promotion much of such technology is purely palliative — and sometimes achieves no more than placebo action."

In other words, to paraphrase this professor a little, I ask you to consider whether an ounce of courage and imagination, even in the health field, might not be worth a ton of technology.

The promotion of health care in the South Pacific poses special problems and challenges. Regional cooperation is clearly an important means of making the best use of our limited resources. Yet the small size and population of many South Pacific countries,

and the vast distances which separate us, make meaningful regional cooperation difficult. The fact is, however, that none of us in the South Pacific is a large country with, individually, substantial resources to devote to health and medicine. New Zealand strongly believes that regional cooperation in health is essential and is worth a lot of effort. We try to play our part by channelling a substantial proportion of our development aid in the health field into regional projects. Our cooperation with the Fiji School of Medicine can be seen in this light as well as being direct assistance to Fiji. I believe that one of the most valuable forms of New Zealand cooperation with your Medical School is the annual visit by medical examiners. Leaders of the various branches of the medical profession in New Zealand spend a week or two every year assisting with your examinations and advising generally. The person contact at that level is invaluable to both sides. This year, as that level is invaluable to both sides. This year, as before, the New Zealand doctors were strong in their praise of what was being achieved at the Fiji School of Medicine.

To conclude, may we wish to graduates every success in your careers. And please keep your horizons broad. Remember the fate of the short-sighted man who fell off the top of the Empire State Building. When passing the second floor he was heard to shout: "So far, so good".

Thank you.

(Source: *Fiji Medical Journal*, Vol. 9 (01);1980).

Lecture Room at Central Medical

(Source: *Fiji School of Medicine Library*)



Pasifika@Massey Strategy



Manui's Hook Water Arts & Design,
Auckland, New Zealand (this is from
Si'ata Tavite's Arts collection)

The Primary aim of Pasifika@Massey is to increase gains for Pacific Peoples through teaching, research and consultancy services at Massey University. Secondary aims are to assist Massey University meets its Charter obligations for Pacific Peoples and to make a positive contribution to Pacific communities and Pacific nations. These aims recognise Massey University as a strategic University in the wider Pacific region, committed to the advancement of Pacific Peoples whether in New Zealand or in island states.

In order to advance the aims, five strategic goals have been identified:

- Goal 1 Academic Advancement
- Goal 2 Professional Development
- Goal 3 Research Capability
- Goal 4 Cultural Diversity
- Goal 5 Collaborative Partnerships

For more details please see: The Pasifika@Massey Strategy: Enroute to Cultural Democracy, by: Durie M., Tu'itahi S., Finau SA., and the Pasifika@Massey Network, 30 July, 2007.

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