

ADDRESS BY
HIS HONOUR MR TOM PAULING AO QC
ADMINISTRATOR OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY
ON THE OCCASION OF
**OPENING ADDRESS OF THE HEALTH PROFESSIONALS
TEACHING AND LEARNING CONFERENCE**

Crown Plaza Hotel, Darwin

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Those of you visiting Darwin may not be aware that the first hospital in Palmerston (later renamed Darwin) was built in 1874. It was a long, narrow, wood and iron building in Packard Street overlooking Doctor's Gully.

At the same time, His Excellency the Governor of South Australia, Sir Anthony Musgrave, received several complaints from aggrieved settlers in the north, one of whom remarked about the Residence, more commonly known now as Government House:

Nature has given a fair tropical climate where men can live fairly well but South Australia and her rulers have decreed her officials shall dwell in places where one would not put a horse. Government House is a dirty barn with fowl houses jutting out around it” - (fowl as in poultry). I’m sure the original hospital was no better and indeed an improved stone structure with high ceilings was built on the same site in 1878.

December 1939 saw the heads of the army, air force and navy jointly demand an adequate hospital for the city. Construction of an 89-bed hospital fronting Lambell Terrace commenced in 1941 to cater for an estimated Darwin area population of 4,000. The new hospital was occupied on 2 February 1942 but bombed just seventeen days later.

By the early 1970s it was evident that increased hospital facilities were required. Extensions had been made but at the time of Cyclone Tracy, Christmas morning 1974, there were many temporary prefabricated wards. The cyclone caused extensive structural damage and a major repair programme was begun.

It was during the 1970s that my wife was a nurse in the Surgical Ward, and in Accident and Emergency, at the old Darwin Hospital. She had also nursed at St Mary's in Paddington London and, back in Australia, she worked for a period for the neurosurgeon Ivan Yaksich, colloquially known in Darwin as "the brain surgeon". He was famous for his passionate desire for improved instruments and operating conditions here. As an aside, my son Fred was born in the old hospital thirty years ago.

The medical profession in the Northern Territory has had to battle lack of facilities, combat floods, cyclones, bush fires and the aftermath of the Bali Bombing. Dengue fever was endemic, leprosy sufferers had to be isolated. We've witnessed developments from melioidosis diagnosis to paediatric and child health therapies, from

mobile treatments for renal disease to the forthcoming oncology radiation unit.

Some aspects, though, have not changed much. Sir Zelman Cowan, former Governor-General of Australia, told the Annual Scientific Meeting of the Royal College of Physicians thirty years ago: *The fact remains, however, that in our contemporary society we are faced with diseases that can be controlled only partly or, it may be, not at all. At the same time there is a demand on the part of an increasingly vocal community for the medical profession to deliver an ideal service.*

I myself confess knowledge of the law and an ignorance of the medical profession; but my attitude and respect reflects that of the Roman lawyer and statesman Cicero who declared *In nothing do men more nearly approach the gods than in giving health to men.*

Professor Brian Jolly is one of your keynote speakers. Today he is the Director of the Centre for Medical and Health Sciences Education at Monash University, but in a previous life he studied psychology at Birmingham University and may appreciate Greek philosopher Plato's comment: *The greatest mistake in the treatment of diseases is that there are physicians for the body and physicians for the soul, although the two cannot be separated.*

Not only is there a vast array of afflictions seeking a cure, but as I perused the recent newsletters produced by General Practice

Network NT, I was struck by the sheer scale of the medical positions that are vacant: from Darwin's CBD and the suburbs across the Northern Territory - from Galiwinku to Utopia, from Barkly to Katherine and Kakadu.

The profession has been blessed by the infusion of talent that migrants have brought with them:

A good example is Dr Nguyen, your Director of Medical and Cultural Education, who spent his childhood in Vietnam. He came to the Territory as a medical student, undertaking a clinical placement at Walangurru community clinic. Inspired by this experience, he completed GP training in Nhulunbuy Galinwin'ku and Numbulwar and continued on as a resident GP at Lajamanu. He then coordinated an Indigenous Health Education Program at Monash.

Working with remote communities brings its rewards, as well as challenges. Next month I will have the pleasure of appointing Ms Carmel Hattch a Member of the Order of Australia in recognition of more than twenty-five years' work in Paediatrics at Alice Springs Hospital.

Also in Alice, Dr Peter Tait was awarded the 2007 Royal Australian College of General Practitioners' award. Dr Tait plays a critical role working for health equity in some of our most disadvantaged

communities. His dedication is reflected in his efforts to speak Pitjantjatjara, Warlpiri and Arrernte – as well as in teaching others.

I don't think that I can do better in summing up than to use a title from one of your workshops tomorrow: *To teach is to learn twice.* Health professionals are required to mentor each other to support clinical, interpersonal and technical skills – and who better to teach you than those with personal knowledge. I am sure most of you have had some great experiences as learners throughout your formative professional lives, although it's fair to say that one individual's favourite teacher can be another's nightmare.

Interestingly, however, the health profession is one where you can find yourself performing or supporting surgery under the watchful eye of a consultant or peer who may have never completed any formal training in educating others. It is therefore a credit to everyone in this room that you have acknowledged the importance of learning to teach more effectively and to work more collaboratively to support each other's professional development.

This Conference is pioneering in its endeavour to support interdisciplinary teams in the best practices for the Northern Territory's teaching and learning context by bringing together highly qualified keynote speakers and presenters. I congratulate the conference committee for their contributions in making this opportunity possible for Territory Health Professionals.

I hope this opportunity is one that leaves a positive lasting footprint on your careers as health practitioners, educators, mentors and learners and importantly on the lives of your patients. I would now like to officially declare the Inaugural Health Professionals Teaching and Learning Conference open.

Thank you.