

SANGAM COLLEGE OF NURSING AND HEALTH CARE EDUCATION

Graduation Ceremony at the Labasa Civic Centre on the 11th December 2019.

Address by Mr. Amraiya Naidu, Academic Board Chairman

The honored guest, the Hon Minister for Health and Medical Services, Dr. Ifereimi Waqanabete, Mrs. Suman Raman, DON, Labasa Hospital, Mr. Rama, VP Northern, President and officials of TISI Sangam Labasa Branch, invited guests, the College Director, Faculty, parents, relatives and graduands.

On behalf of the National President of Sangam, the Academic Board and the Faculty, I too wish to extend to you all a very warm welcome and express our sincere appreciation for your presence to witness and celebrate the achievement of our students. A special word of welcome to our Chief Guest for kindly accepting our invitation to grace this very important occasion for the College and in the lives of the graduating students.

It is customary for us in the Sangam family and for the benefit of everyone to remember on an important occasion like this the contribution made by the founding father, Sadhu Kuppaswami, and some like-minded Girit stalwarts who together conceived the idea and formed the organization, TISI Sangam, in 1926, 93 years ago. We owe much to them for their hard work and foresight in establishing the organization at that time and in difficult environment for the benefit of the generations to come. The least we can do, therefore, is to remember and thank them for their visionary zeal because had it not been for their effort we would not be gathered here under the Sangam banner to witness the achievement of the students from our institution. Adhering to one of the objectives of the founding father for the organization to remain engaged in the educational activities, it is gratifying that the succession of leaders, the torch bearers of the organization,

focused on the concept of the pioneers in adding and expanding the educational facilities around the country for us to see and appreciate the developments done since inception.

Sangam operates several early childhood learning centres, 21 primary and 5 secondary schools some of which are among the largest in the country. In 2005, the management decided to venture into providing tertiary education by establishing with the government approval the Sangam College of Nursing at Labasa. This is the 14th year of our operation. The College taught Diploma of Nursing course till 2014 and graduated 445 students. The College during the period also graduated 28 students with Enrolled Nursing certificate, 75 Midwives and 8 Nurse Practitioners with post graduate Diploma qualification. Our College collaborated with APTC and jointly taught and graduated the first batch of 21 students the FHEC approved Aged Care course.

It was a milestone achievement in the history of nursing education in Fiji for the College to develop the Bachelor of Nursing Science degree course in 2012 and commenced teaching in 2013 after receiving the necessary approvals from the Fiji Nursing Council and the Fiji Higher Education Commission. The first batch graduated with degree in 2015 and since then to 2018, we graduated 364 students. 110 will graduate today. All our graduates are serving with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services.

The current College roll is 448 students with 41 staff.

Yet another accomplishment of our College was the development of the Bachelor of Nursing (Post Registration) Bridging Curriculum in 2016 for assisting the nurses working full time to upgrade their qualification from Diploma to Degree. The

flexible mode of delivery of the course blended with face- to- face lectures and on-line distance learning made it possible for us to graduate 554 nurses from Labasa, Suva, Lautoka and Ba Centres. The institution is proud of the fact that it has made an immense contribution to the profession by helping the full time working nurses to upgrade their qualification with the programme of studies approved by FNC and endorsed by FHEC. We have witnessed the benefit of offering the approved programme of studies. A couple of former students had migrated to NZ with the Diploma of Nursing qualification and were unable to get themselves registered to serve as nurses. They were told that the bachelors degree was the minimum qualification required for consideration. They came to Suva and successfully completed the bridging programme with us and on return got themselves registered and employed as nurses. It is a matter of great pride for us at the college to know that our course is recognized and accredited by the NZ authorities.

The management provides necessary resources requested by the staff to facilitate teaching and learning at the College. This year we spent \$29,101.00 in buying books, \$78,507.00 in equipping the clinical laboratories for undergraduate and Midwifery classes, \$9,113.00 for supplies in the IT department and \$11,368.00 in Staff development.

In the second half of this year, the college invited James Cook University in Queensland, Australia to undertake a review of the three courses, namely; Bachelor of Nursing Science, Post Graduate Diploma of Midwifery and Nurse Practitioner. The College had not had external curriculum reviews done for any of the programme and it was considered necessary in keeping with the Strategic Plan 2018 to 2022 to embark on quality assurance initiative for the three courses. The FHEC had recently updated its accreditation design standards which stipulates that

qualification content and outcomes are reviewed and remain current and relevant. The purpose of the reviews was to examine the quality of each course and whether the curricula meet current international standards and best practice and make appropriate recommendations.

The review team comprised 10 JCU staff with nursing and midwifery academics who had substantial clinical proficiency and expertise in curriculum development and review and teaching and learning. Importantly, each team had staff with sound knowledge of Pacific Island culture and nursing and midwifery practice. A ten-member team from the College were involved as their counterparts who facilitated the information sought during the review process.

The JCU team stated that the current curricula prepare their respective graduates with the requisite capabilities to perform safely and professionally their roles. The reviewers, however, identified areas for improvement which are being integrated by our staff for implementation from 2020. The objective of the exercise undertaken was to ensure that the programmes offered at the Sangam College of Nursing continue to produce high quality graduates with the capability to be among the next generation nursing, midwifery and Nurse Practitioner leaders in Fiji.

The College has signed a memorandum of understanding with Brigham Young University (BYU). For the past three years about a dozen nursing students accompanied with three Professors had been visiting the college as part of their overseas attachment experience. Their visits had been beneficial to both the staff and students. The visiting professors taught on selected topics as guest lecturers and the students exchanged notes in group discussions. As a goodwill gesture, they donated 20

Neo- natal and two adult sized mannequins to the College. These items will be extensively used as teaching aids in the clinical laboratory.

Sangam Nursing College has a memorandum of understanding with the Fiji College of Nursing and the Ministry of Health and Medical Services to facilitate the teaching of the Post Graduate Certificate in Child Health Nursing programme. 19 nurses are enrolled in the first cohort.

The College is and only be as good as the team of staff who make the difference. The buildings, investment in IT, Library, Clinical Laboratories and other things will be wasted resources without the dedicated staff and their ability to make effective use of the facilities provided to guide, encourage and inspire students to be at their best under their tutelage. The slogan which we often hear is that no child should be left behind is not simply a rhetoric for our staff. I am pleased and feel proud to share with the parents and well-wishers that the staff are always ready to go an extra mile to ensure that all who join us are nurtured and supported in every way possible to groom them to become worthy members of the nursing profession instilling in them the human values they will need to apply in serving the sick and the needy. Someone rightly pointed out that the destiny of the nation is decided by the ideals implanted by teachers in the minds of the students entrusted in their care. It is quite natural for some students each year to get distracted and go off the rail. With early identification, intervention and a close monitoring of such cases the staff succeed in getting them back on course to complete their studies. The graduating students are the best judges of the quality of lecturers we have as they had the opportunity to evaluate them at the end of each semester course in the last three years. The management appointed the best available applicants to the positions who had relevant qualification and years of clinical experience. They are the role models for the students with the ability to blend the text books knowledge with their hands on experience. In addition, they make collective effort to integrate

through the curriculum by inculcating among the students the virtues such as honesty, integrity, goodness, uprightness, trustworthiness etc. and human values such as care, empathy, compassion, kindness to name a few which qualities the nurses must acquire in abundance to apply daily in their relationship with the patients .Our objective is to create a brand name of the College for the former students to stand tall as members of the profession thus making all of us associated with the institution feel proud.

The smooth and efficient operation of the College is made possible with the collective responsibility shared by the office and support personnel working tirelessly to facilitate teaching and learning. Whether it be typing and printing examination papers, providing timely staff and students services, enabling maximum utilization of IT and Library resources, collection and prudent management of funds, picking and dropping students at night without any incident, upkeep of physical facilities and the compound to present an attractive environment as a learning centre are all taken care of by the self-motivated and a dedicated team of staff working behind the scene. We thank them for their roles in contributing to the efficient running of the College activities.

We commend the acting Head of School and the Director for their leadership in the delivery of various programmes of studies and for consciously overseeing consistency in the quality of graduates from the College. We thank them for the job well done!

Graduating Students

We have two groups graduating today comprising 11 Nurse Practitioners and 110 undergraduate students with Bachelor of Nursing Science degree who studied full-time at the College for the past three years.

Eleven Nurse Practitioner students completed their 18 months long programme of studies on 13th September, 2019. They then returned to their duty stations to await the registration examination independently conducted by the Fiji Nursing Council which was held last week.

Nurse practitioners are ranked the highest in the nursing cadre grade. To align with the future needs of the Ministry of Health & Medical Services, the College is planning to offer specialization for NP students in the areas of oncology, pediatrics, emergency and surgical training.

The post graduate students have different challenges compared to undergraduate students. Almost all of them are married, some with children to worry about, have to juggle finance to pay mortgages and above all to cope with their studies. The fact that the eleven of you have come thus far to graduate today is an exceptional achievement which is commendable. You have covered the hard yard into that journey and are here with joy and excitement to collect your reward.

To the undergraduate students, when you reflect for a moment on your first day at the college in 2017, you will recollect that each one of you was a stranger to one another with hardly any familiar face around. I am pretty sure for some of you the idea would have crossed the mind that you had come to us completely oblivious about the rigours, the demands of the programme of studies and the College expectation succinctly and patiently outlined by the Director and the members of the faculty during the week of the orientation. It would have been a natural reaction for them to have felt that they had come to a wrong institution. We are very pleased that you had mustered up the courage to tough it out so as to make your life worthy and meaningful. During the past three years of studying together,

the collegiality and friendship that you have developed amongst yourselves has united you in a lasting family bond.

" There is nothing on this earth more to be prized than true friendship", said St Thomas Aquinas. You have made many during the past three years and we are confident that you will maintain contact to do networking with each other to compare notes on your professional activities. It must be a great sigh of relief that you have reached the destination after a long and difficult terrain which had many obstacles to overcome. It goes to show that you came to us like a blank page about the course and slowly toiled very hard to eventually get written on it the attainment of the Bachelor of Nursing Science degree. We are equally delighted that you did not allow the outside influence and distractions to derail you from the path of your mission.

You no longer will be students from tomorrow in the formal sense of being in the classroom for lectures, and there will be no curriculum to follow. The question is, will you step up to take on extra assignment? Will you display a positive attitude? Will you strive to make things better? Each decision will determine in some way your opportunities, your path, your success and define who you become along the way after your educational achievement at the College.

Nurses experience exciting and challenging times in their patients lives, be it from helping to deliver a baby to nursing someone with terminal illness. No two days can be the same. The days can be exhausting and stressful during shifts including late nights, saving lives, offering comfort to both the patient and the grieving family members. They get to touch the very core of the people they serve. It will be good to remember that fulfilment of duty to derive satisfaction is part of the spiritual discipline and in its absence the service provided would be regarded as a mere task without any human feelings attached to it.

President Obama speaking on the occasion of National Nurses week celebration had this to say, I quote, "***America's nurses are the beating heart of our medical system***". A brief but a load statement which truly reflects and sums up the role of nurses anywhere in the world as visioned by the founder of modern nursing, Florence Nightingale. Feel proud and elated that you have been trained to become a member of that profession. Our staff have not only equipped you with knowledge but also with their collective effort instilled in you the human values as an invisible part of the curriculum. We have thus trained you to be a nurse. You have to begin to feel and then practice as a member of the profession which holds compassion, caring and healing as three of its ideals.

We thank the graduating students for joining Sangam Nursing College for the training. We are proud of your accomplishment and for being worthy members of the College family. The image and the reputation of the institution will be judged and measured by the work ethics and your performance as the ex-students. We ask that you be conscious of the fact that whatever you do, good or bad, will have reflections on your own alma mater. We also urge you to wear daily with pride the badge pinned on you just before you entered the hall to remind you of your association with the College and the sangam family.

On behalf of Sangam Management, the Academic Board, the College Director, staff, your family and friends, I wish to warmly congratulate you for persevering with devotion and determination to create your future destiny and for giving us all a meaning and a purpose to gather here on this very joyous occasion to witness the crowing of your success.

Our blessings to each one of you today and always.