Kos Sclavos  
National President,  
The Pharmacy Guild of Australia  

Monday 28 July 2008, 6.00pm

Graduates from: Faculty of Arts | Faculty of Education | Griffith Health | Griffith Law School | Queensland College of Art | Science, Environment, Engineering and Technology

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Jagera People.

I would also like to acknowledge:
Chancellor, Ms Leneen Forde AC  
Vice Chancellor and President, Professor Ian O'Connor  
Members of the official party  
Graduates of 2008  
Ladies and Gentleman

It is a great honour for me to stand before you tonight.

Some years ago when my parents migrated to Australia from a small Greek Island called Kythera, their thoughts were of making good in a new country, raising a family and giving them opportunities for the future. It is a great source of pride to them that my three brothers and I all chose health professions as careers – Specialist radiology, dentistry and myself pharmacy. I have undertaken much study in my life, but until tonight I was the only Sclavos sibling who was not a doctor! I thank Griffith University for bestowing this honorary doctorate on me and thanks for now eliminating the Dr issue as a source of family bragging rights.

My current role as the National President of the Pharmacy Guild of Australia, we are the peak body that represents community pharmacies in Australia and as such we are the custodians of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme or PBS as you may know it. The pharmacist is the medicines expert and their primary role is to ensure patients get the maximum benefit from these medicines. I also believe passionately in access to health services for all Australians, regardless of their economic circumstances. This presents us with many challenges in terms of remote access, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, health professional shortages, burden of chronic disease, specific disease states and budgetary constraints, to name a few. But it is a challenge that we must be up for, and a situation we must endeavour to always improve. The challenges that currently face our health system can be daunting. It is however this challenge that drives me.

To the graduates, you will need to adapt to those challenges you will face in your careers and in your private life. Having come through the University system you are now more prepared than you realise. The hard road you have gone through to get to your graduation today will hold you in good stead to deal with all issues. This is why tonight you, your family, and friends should celebrate your achievement. Graduating tonight from our world class university Griffith University should always be chalked up as a highlight of your lives.

In life we face many challenges – also joys – professional and personal. You can not always prepare for these challenges. The road ahead is not always what you expect. In 2003, our beloved son Stanley passed away at age 10, after a three year battle with leukaemia. My learnings of the health system from the patient’s perspective is what drives me today to help build a better health system.

Griffith University’s mission statement outlines commitment to:
- Innovation
- Bringing disciplines together
- Internationalisation
- Equity and social justice
- Lifelong learning

When I read this, it occurred to me that the majority of these ideals are not dissimilar to those of community pharmacy.
Innovation - The Pharmacy Guild, on behalf of pharmacy, is at the cutting edge of industry innovation. As an example we have developed world class IT tools like Project STOP. This is a tool that connect all 5000 pharmacies in Australia together and we monitor Pseudoephedrine, a common ingredient for cold and flu remedies, however it is also used to manufacture ‘ice’ an illicit drug. Almost overnight the illegal diversion of the product has stopped enabling legitimate customers to have continued access to the most effective products for cold and sinus symptomatic relief.

Bring Disciplines Together - Through constructive partnerships – doctors and pharmacists - we have developed programs like the Home Medicines Review which allows the elderly or those in need to have their medications reviewed in their homes, by pharmacists, in consultation with their doctor. This has had an impact on reducing hospitalisations, reduced falls and delivers better health outcomes for patients.

Internationalisation – In the next 5 years the paper prescriptions you are all used to today are likely to disappear and will be replaced by electronic prescriptions. Through our sister organisations overseas we at the Guild will ensure that we learn from their experiences overseas, taking on the best elements, and building the best system for Australia.

Equity and Social Justice – At the Pharmacy Guild we also have a very strong commitment to equity of access to medications and care, for the entire Australian community. PBS Prescription medicines are now the only product in the Australian community you pay the same price for no matter where you live in Australia. So all pensioners pay $5 no matter where you live.

In addition community pharmacy also has a commitment to the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We have developed programs with those communities to achieve greater access to medications, and greater assistance with medication management. We also have scholarship programs in place to train future indigenous pharmacists and pharmacy assistants from within these communities.

Finally, in relation to equity, the absolute majority of people who work in community pharmacies are women, for whom we have structured career paths, training in place and flexibility in regards to work schedules.

Lifelong Learning – Now on your graduation night the last thing you want to hear is that you need to study more, and that your study has not stopped. Let me give you an example from pharmacy of why this is important. I graduated in 1985 learning about the latest medicines. Now 18 years later only 4 medicines in the top 20 medicines on the PBS were around in 1985. There is always something new to learn.

The Greek philosopher Plato said that “The direction in which education starts a man will determine his future life.”

How will the skills that we each learn in life, sustain our lives in the future?

I wonder how many of you this evening have a passion for some of the challenges we face in our various communities and on the planet we all share. I am guessing most, if not all of you. You can make a difference. History has proven that individuals do make a difference.

In many ways it is a daunting, challenging time. But it is also an exciting time – a time of opportunity. Just as the health sector serves challenges to me and my colleagues on a daily basis, you have all studied disciplines that will have challenges of an equal magnitude.

Think laterally and think how you can bring your specific talents to fruition through your career.

Friedrich Nietzsche said “You have your way. I have my way. As for the right way, the correct way, and the only way, it does not exist.”

The time is always right to look for new solutions to some enduring problems.

I will leave you with a thought from the Chinese philosopher Confucius who said, “Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life.” Let's hope he is right, and not that famous Greek Philosopher Aristotle who said, “All paid jobs absorb and degrade the mind.”

Again, I would like to thank you all. I gratefully accept the honour that has been bestowed upon me tonight, and I wish each of you the very best in your career and in your life.

I would like to end by repeating my congratulations to today’s graduates. My particular congratulations to the pharmacy students that graduate tonight. I am very proud of the pharmacy course at Griffith and
the Guild has supported the course here from day one. Griffith University is the current holder of the Guild’s Pharmacy Management Championship, The President of the National Students Union is a Griffith student and Griffith will host the 2009 National Student conference selected ahead of 16 pharmacy schools in Australia. My congratulations to Nerida and the Pharmacy Academic team. To the pharmacy graduates it’s very heart warming to see you here tonight.

Again, my warmest congratulations to all graduates. This is a wonderful achievement and my best wishes for a great night of celebration.

I will finish with one of my favourite quotes from Michalangelo.

“The greatest danger for most of us
Is not that we aim too high and miss it,
But that we aim too low and reach it.”

Thank you and aim high.