



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

ST. AUGUSTINE, TRINIDAD & TOBAGO, WEST INDIES

OFFICE OF THE CAMPUS PRINCIPAL

Pro Vice-Chancellor & Campus Principal, Professor Brian Copeland

Remarks by the Campus Principal and Pro Vice-Chancellor Professor Brian Copeland

National Symposium on Midwifery

The Honourable Terrence Deyalsingh- Minister, Ministry of Health

Dr. Rodolfo Gomez Ponce de Leon - Regional Reproductive Health Advisor Latin American Centre for Perinatology, Woman and Health Unit PAHO/WHO

Dr. Bernadette Theodore-Gandi- PAHO/WHO Country Representative, Trinidad and Tobago

Mrs. Frances Day-Stirk – President, International Confederation of Midwives

Professor Terence Seemungal, Dean-Faculty of Medical Sciences, The UWI, St. Augustine Campus

Mrs. Marcia Rollock- President, Caribbean Regional Midwives Association (CRMA)

Mr. Idi Stuart- President, Trinidad and Tobago Registered Nurses Association (TTRNA)

Directors and Heads of Departments

Staff, Students and Other invited guests

Members of the Media

The School of Nursing of The University of the West Indies was established in 2005 with a very specific mandate: to produce a cadre of much needed nursing leaders at the clinical, administrative and academic levels. It has been consistent in its vision of being a dynamic force in the nursing arena of Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean. In achieving this objective, the School collaborates with local, regional and international partners so as to enhance the stature of nursing education in the region.

This National Symposium on Midwifery is one of the ways in which our School of Nursing is turning that vision into reality and fulfilling its mandate. I wish to especially thank all our partners in this two-day Symposium for their continued support of the objectives and goals of The UWI, which ultimately redound to the benefit of our region.

As you may be aware, The UWI School of Nursing offers specialties that prepare nurses to assume leadership positions at all levels of nursing within their particular disciplines. Students engage in a robust academic experience in an environment conducive to effective teaching and learning. We are proud of our revolutionary and exciting approaches to education such as Distance Education, Teleconferencing, Computer Assisted Instruction and Mentoring.

At this juncture, I would like to pay homage to nursing pioneer Florence Nightingale, also known as the “Lady with the Lamp.” Florence Nightingale also a statistician, social reformer, and the foundational philosopher of modern nursing. She established the first scientifically based nursing school and was instrumental in setting up training for midwives and nurses in workhouse infirmaries. It is instructive that we are nine days away from commemorating her birth and celebrating the important role of nurses in health care. Nurse Florence Nightingale has left us a tremendous legacy to which we must aspire.

Dr. Judy Mill of the Faculty of Nursing at the University of Alberta, made the point that the roles of nurses in the 21st century have become more complex. She notes that the '*inequities in health within and across nations demand that nursing students examine the interconnectedness between local and global health challenges and contribute to the development and implementation of solutions to these challenges*'.

In other words, your role is one of pro-active and often innovative action.

Kelly Hancock, Executive Chief Nursing Officer and Chief Nursing Officer, at Cleveland Clinic Main Campus, also stresses that the '*daily practice of nursing regularly includes thinking creatively or ‘outside the box’, as outcomes of patient care often depend on this fine-tuned skill.*'

It's not at all acceptable, she says, to cop out with the claim "*I'm just doing my job as best as possible*".

As nurses, you are very much partners in progress for your profession, for this country, and this region, whether you are

optimising patient care, improving safety and patient outcomes, or simply creating efficiencies in your day-to-day responsibilities.

This value system assumes even greater importance when you are a midwife. Midwifery plays a significant social role of any community. Indeed, the fundamental meaning of the word - ‘with woman’ - speaks directly to the unique relationship that is created between the mother and her midwife.

A 2013 WHO bulletin describes midwives as “*warriors on the front-line of health care, battling to ensure that women survive childbirth and that babies are born safely even in the most marginalized areas.*” For some 40 million women, without access to hospitals and trained midwives, their reality is one of tremendous pain and, too often, still births or newborn deaths.

Many of you here would agree with me, when I say that the role of a midwife is very much underrated. However, the thrust today is to put midwives centre stage in reproductive health programmes so as to drastically cut still births as well as the deaths of new born babies and mothers. Access to best practice and trained midwives can considerably reduce these fatal, often avoidable, incidents. I know I

am speaking to the converted when I say that the impact of midwives goes beyond pregnancy outcomes or, as some people say, “catching babies” as midwives provide advice on new-born care, breastfeeding, family planning and, even, cervical and breast cancer screening.

The WHO Global Strategic Directions for Strengthening Nursing and Midwifery 2016–2020 is the principal global guiding document for the development of nursing and midwifery in Member States. The most recent World Health Assembly Resolution, WHA 64.7, in addition to preceding resolutions, gives WHO the mandate to strengthen the capacity of the nursing and midwifery workforce through the development of strategies and the provision of technical support to Member States. By 2025, it is the hope that all mothers would have access to trained midwives. A pipe dream, perhaps, when we know that for this to happen, we need our leaders to step forward.

Where would the world be if Florence Nightingale had not been strong and persistent in the face of opposition and obstacles? In her book, ‘Introductory Notes on Lying-in Institutions’, Florence Nightingale found that:

“..with all their defects, midwifery statistics point to one truth; namely that there is a large amount of preventable mortality, and that, as a general rule, the mortality is far, far greater in lying-in in hospitals than among women lying-in at home”.

We have come very far from those 19th century practices. Yet, at times, it seems that we have not come far enough.

Nursing innovations have, since inception, directly and indirectly advanced the nursing profession. As the people on the ground and in the trenches, and just like that passionate statistician Florence Nightingale, your observations and innovations can impact future improvements and fuel progress.

Nursing is indeed a noble profession but it is also a calling. It comes with a moral and social responsibility to the citizens of the Caribbean and of the world; a role that you must recognise and accept. On this note, I wish you all success at this symposium on midwifery

I thank you.