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Convocation Address
Faculty of Nursing, McMaster University
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Thank you, Mr. Chancellor, Dr. George, Dean Catherine Tompkins and the Nursing Faculty.

This honour that you have presented to me today is indeed the privilege of leadership, and so today I wish to share this honorary Doctor of Laws with my Hamilton Community Foundation colleagues, Board members, community partners and our donors who really make all of our work possible. I'd also like to express my congratulations to Dorothy Hall – the pioneer in Primary Health Care Nursing. Dorothy, it is a personal honour to share the stage with you today.

Graduates, Parents, Friends and Faculty:

First of all, my personal congratulations to the Graduates for a tremendous achievement, and to the parents, friends and faculty for sharing in the success of this graduating class.

When I was reflecting on this opportunity to address Convocation, I thought that I should consult with one of my trusted advisors, and so I e-mailed my 12-year-old niece in Asia and asked for her thoughts. Hannah responded by saying, "Auntie Carolyn, I think that you should tell them why you went into nursing and what nursing has meant for your career." And so, taking Hannah's advice, I'd like to share that story with you, and hopefully I will be able to begin to sketch the great possibilities that lie ahead for each and every one of you.

Like most of you, there was that moment in time in my formative years when I believe I was deeply influenced regarding the impact that an individual could have on another's life. I was seven years old and my young parents had begun to take in foster children. They came as families, or as little individuals, usually frightened, malnourished and unwell. It was my first introduction to the fact that there was not a level playing field in life, but what I also witnessed was that my parents – especially my Mother – nursed these children back to health and loved and cared for them until they were adopted. It was my first mentoring experience and my Mom became my first role model. My draw to the profession of Nursing came out of this early, important experience. And throughout my career, it has been reinforced over and over again – the extraordinary impact that nurses have on individuals and their families at what is often their most fragile and vulnerable time.

I encourage you to draw on whatever experiences have helped to shape your motivation to enter this noble profession, as it will help to continue to fuel your passion to make a difference over the lifetime of your career.

Nursing, for me, was the introduction to a career that offered multiple dimensions, roles, ongoing challenge, learning and great personal satisfaction. From a mental health

practitioner at the bedside, to an educator, to a pioneer in palliative care, to community nursing and then to administration of a VON branch – it has been a marvellous career! You might ask how an individual could move to each of these positions without formal preparation as an educator, business administrator, consultant, etc. I can tell you that my academic preparation here at McMaster – you know, that world-renowned, problem-based learning model – prepared me to become a life-long learner. The content was forever changing, but the process would be the dependable tool for each career adventure. So I'm here to tell you that it does really work!

You have graduated armed with a similar skill that will give you the courage and framework to try new things and explore your potential as a professional. Along this journey, you will develop extraordinary teaching, planning, organizing, team building, problem solving, crisis management and relationship management skills. These skills, coupled with the science of Nursing and your motivation and passion, will allow you to assume a leadership position, whether you are at the bedside, as an educator, as a researcher or as a manager.

Little did I know that for me the totality of my nursing career was preparing me for my next career as President & CEO of Hamilton Community Foundation – a charitable vehicle that unites generous Hamiltonians with worthwhile causes in all elements of the charitable sector in the city of Hamilton. My career in Nursing prepared me NOT to see the community in just its parts, but to see it as a whole, complex system where one issue has implications for the whole. Just like the “person” that represented a complex system of physical, social and spiritual elements, it was impossible for me to see simplistic solutions in my work. My experience helped me to understand that the 21st century called for new approaches to the complex work of community, and that problems needed to be understood within an economical, social and environmental framework. As a nurse, I understood that no one discipline had the monopoly on patient care, and that it would take a team to address the full needs of the patient.

In dealing with complex issues, like poverty, we knew that we had to eliminate the silos of the volunteer, private and public sectors and provide a table that would not only facilitate a 360° vision, but that would also involve the very people living in circumstances of poverty. You can see the parallels and you can see the Profession's influence. My nursing values, beliefs and theoretical frameworks are simply part of everything that I do!

So what lies ahead for you? First of all, you are an elite group of professionals who will bring strong science to the care of patients. You are well positioned as life-long learners in a fast-paced, forever changing environment.

- Those of you who are earning your Ph.D. and Master's degrees today will contribute to the building of Nursing knowledge and science that will ultimately impact on patient care and the profession.
- The Nurse Practitioners graduating today are blazing new trails in a system steeped in a past that is no longer relevant in the health care system of the 21st century. We look to you to continue to demonstrate a new vision for the role of Nursing.

- Those of you graduating as new Baccalaureates today are our future Nursing leaders. You will ultimately mentor many young nurses and physicians in your bedside role, as an educator or manager.

The extraordinary expertise that you will develop will ultimately save lives and support patients and their families on some of the most challenging journeys of their lives. Some of you will have children named after you, and you will be a part of family folklore as stories are passed on about your skill, care and concern.

Many of you will be involved in the re-design of a health care system that will support one of the most diverse populations in the world; some of you may enter politics to bring a unique perspective to the government of our country.

And some of you, like me, may find yourself in other professions that capitalize on the nursing knowledge and expertise developed during your professional tenure. Wherever you may find yourself, the values, beliefs and theories of nursing can only strengthen your leadership.

And finally, I'd like to share some advice that I hope will be helpful to you as you embark on your chosen career:

1. Make sure that you have a trusted mentor along the way. The advice and support of a mentor will see you through the many ups and downs that are sure to come your way. And many of my mentors are here today.
2. Don't wait for your advice to be sought. Your nursing opinion could and will have a major impact, not only on patient care, but also on the health care system. Offer it as opportunities present themselves.
3. Commit yourself to a life-long learning process that will refine and strengthen your practice.
4. And, most importantly, advocate for your patients – and be the guardian of a standard of practice to which you have committed yourself professionally.

Once again, my congratulations to all – this day belongs to you!