

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH ON RECEIVING PHD(h.c.)

From NELSON MANDELA UNIVERSITY:

It is my greatest joy to be bestowed with the honour of being one of the recipients of an honorary degree from this University during my lifetime. I honestly feel humbled by your kind recognition of my modest contribution.

As a preamble I'd like to narrate that it was very difficult for my father to get his medical education, as there were NO facilities for black South Africans. He studied in Scotland and unfortunately his father suffered a stroke before he finished his last year, whereby he returned. Then, he had great difficulty to go and complete his studies when his dad had died in 1930, until he even married and had 2 kids. Finally, he got a bursary from the UTTGC (so-called Bunga) of the then Transkei and he completed in 1936 and was the 23rd non-white medical practitioner in S.A. all qualified abroad. It had been his dire wish that one of his children would take after him, and come to work in rural Transkei.

My mother who was a lady-teacher was a leader in church, Sunday school teacher, Girl-Guider, and died as President of Women's Zenzele ("do it yourself") Association - hence my only remaining sibling here with us today was called *Nozenzele*, had a motto "**LIFT AS YOU RISE**". These narratives are meant to illustrate where I inherited the traits of wishing to help others.

My dear father died as I was completing Matriculation at Healdtown Missionary Institution; and my Mathematics teacher Miss Blunsom offered to pay my fees to complete up to my 1st year B.Sc at Fort Hare.

It was the Bantu Welfare Trust of the Institute of Race Relations that funded my trip to UK where I trained and completed post-basic Orthopaedic nursing. Thereupon I was awarded a scholarship to study medicine by the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA), on condition I would upon qualifying go help in some developing country in 1965. Hence, I can sing the song by one Alma Andrazzo:- *"If I can help somebody as I pass along, If I can cheer somebody with a word or song....If I can do my duty as a Christian ought, If I can bring back beauty to a world upwrought....**Then my living shall not be in vain**"!*

Ladies and Gentlemen, it was no easy task to pioneer and establish a faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences in a "*bush*" university with a meagre 7-12 million rand. One had to be resolute and have a vision. Much as we hated the apartheid system, and would do anything to see it destroyed, the homeland system which we detested was crafted by some of us to make it work for us and our nation - in that it gave space to manipulate a field that had hitherto been dominated by the apartheid forces to the detriment of rural and poor communities in SA. A feather in our cap is that when we got our freedom in 1994, we were prudent not to throw away the baby with the bath water.

In 1985, I reiterated the 1978 Alma Ata Declaration viz: **Health for all by the year 2000** during my and the faculty's inauguration. I committed the faculty to implementing a problem-based, community-based and community oriented medical education. It was time that healthcare was delivered differently in this country. It was time that healthcare education talked to the needs of the communities its products are meant to serve. Time for change had come, and through the semblance of autonomy from the apartheid regime we could effect change.

I mentioned that developing rural and even urban communities suffered from diseases which are, in the long term related to socio-economic predicament, and which paradoxically are preventable at relatively low cost. And thus after visiting John Hopkins in USA, and Israel's Ben Guiron medical school in the Negev -Beersheba, and later McMasters in Canada we opted for emphasis on Primary Health Care which is directed on **preventative rather than curative** medicine. The multitude of the sick was not to make us deny the existence of health. The basic philosophy on undergraduate medical education must be to raise the standards of healthcare system of which it is part, making the most efficient use of the available human and physical resources.

The medical school's objective giving priority to PHC, accepted responsibility for the comprehensive healthcare and participate actively in the implementation of national policy in Southern Africa. I am glad to say the other faculties in S.A. came to study our model of education and as late as last month an article in the Daily Dispatch of Eastern Cape of the 17th depicted ours as the **BEST in AFRICA**.

Thus, the stage for a "*Socially Accountable Medical Education*" in SA was set. By the time this became a buzz-phrase in Geneva and Ottawa in the year 2000, it had been long implemented in Mthatha's University of Transkei alias WSU!

The WHO defines the Social Accountability of Medical Schools as "**the obligation to direct their education, research and service activities towards addressing the priority health concerns of the community, region, and/or nation they have a mandate to serve. The priority health concerns are to be identified jointly by government, health care organizations, health professionals and the public.**"

This calls on all Alumni to develop research questions that will give answers to a range of healthcare challenges faced by resource-constrained communities.

I am delighted that amongst us here is one of my pioneer student Dr. Noah practising here in NMM, and that the Founding Dean of NMMU Faculty of Health Sciences is one of our product Prof Pepeta who is a cardiologist.

Hence, it is with gratitude and humility that I accept this honorary degree of PhD conferred upon me today as Founding Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Transkei (UNITRA) now called WSU.

PROF. MARINA XABA-MOKOENA.