

Acceptance Speech by Professor David Forbes, for the former colleagues category of the Philippa Maddern Award 2017.

Colleagues, although I never had the privilege of knowing Philippa Maddern, I was aware of her contributions to the academic community, and subsequently to broader society. She is described in the biographic statement on the UWAASA website as an inspiration, an irresistibly good person who lived life passionately and who fostered community.

From reading about Philippa I get a strong sense that she perceived that an academic career is a privilege, and not something to be taken for granted. This is especially so if it can be spent in an environment such as that provided by this university, on this campus. The environment and milieu is part of the nursery of ideas that creates academic thought and processes.

Her commitment to community was an acknowledgement that privilege is accompanied by responsibility.

We are all too well aware that the course of the last two years, and the process of restructure and renewal, have distracted us from the real business of academia. Within my own Faculty uncertainty over structure and relationships has threatened teaching capacity within medicine disciplines. The discourses of this association emphasise the perceived threat to higher education, and emphasise the tensions between the funding of research and the provision of education.

In thinking about our responsibilities as academics, I looked at the current UWA performance appraisal process, to try and itemise what is it that the university values? The current assessment processes that the university maintains a focus upon leadership in education, internationally renowned research and community and global engagement

Behind these nice sounding phrases is an emphasis upon exhibition of self-control and the ability to set and meet deadlines, and international rankings. I thought that I must have missed something and so I searched for the word service in the HR pages. Sadly this word seems to have been deleted from these pages and it appears that service is no longer considered an important part of the University of WA ethos. The broader community service that we yield through discipline leadership, contributions to government and public education and which used to be part of our assessment seem no longer relevant to UWA. I suspect that this is a direction that Philippa Maddern would not have approved. I find this shift in emphasis all the more surprising when I consider the public investment in this University, and in particular my own faculty, which was launched on the back of a public subscription.

Working within paediatric medicine at UWA for the past 25 years has been immensely rewarding. Medicine is about relationships and changing behaviour, as you attempt to improve health. Paediatric medicine is in a field where idealism can still be indulged, as the opportunities for recovery and growth and development are so great. So, I have had the opportunity to indulge passions while building friendships and positive relationships.

In addition the practice of paediatrics it is usually a lot of fun. The honesty of children is frequently entertaining, and such that you always know where you stand, and as they get older the piquant language of adolescents can be confronting. Added to this the constant risk of being targeted by an infant's evacuatory orifices means that it is difficult to take oneself too seriously.

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The responsibilities of a clinical academic are varied, but a significant part of this responsibility relates to our students. Some of this is self-interest. When I look around a group of students I sometimes wonder which of them will I trust to make decisions about my treatment, or perhaps worse, to wreak some undignified examination upon my person in years to come.

My role in clinical academia has provided me with special rewards, as I have had patients, who have become students who have become junior doctors who have become my colleagues. The opportunity to be invited to be part of the journey of a young person, from vulnerable individual to competent contributing adult is somewhat unique

I thank you for your acknowledgement with this award, which is doubly pleasurable, because it was so unexpected. I feel humbled to be linked by this award to Philippa Maddern. I also feel somewhat fraudulent for being rewarded for being allowed to pursue a passion.

Thank you.

Professor David Forbes
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