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**Prowess of Healing****Prof. Priyani Soysa**

**T**oday is a great day for all of you who are in black graduand gowns in this hall. It is a great pleasure to address you, and for this honour, I thank the Dean and his cohort of medical scientists-the professors, Senior and Junior Lecturers and also the youngest probationers, all of whom add to the glory and colour of this occasion.

My memory goes back to 1950 when I, like you, sat down in the audience to be conferred the MBBS after six year training in Colombo.

Whatever the motivation that led you to enter these portals, today you feel free that the shackles of many exhausting examinations have been shed. When you look back, you have achieved the desire to be a professional. A recent survey of medical students was portrayed with some regrets, of students who feared that they had not anticipated such a rigorous training. To them I say, that I hope you have evolved from that earlier shock and now, the realization of the great responsibility of a professional will inspire you. Indeed you will now carry human life in your hands and you must carry that with humility and not with arrogance, and that is given to you with a shower of blessings. Respect life: save life, along with this prowess of healing you have been trained to acquire, goes the Doctor Patient relationship with its innuendoes, the responsibility to function as efficiently as it is within your human ability and the confidentiality which goes along with that responsibility. At all times, you are called upon to rush for emergencies and the daily rounds, mindful of having all your wits about you, and a behavior worthy of the medical profession. In short, now don another special cloak, that of a professional which in today's local context is much criticized for erratic performance. Sad to say, there is some truth in such criticism because there are these who forget the patient's rights. Public demands are not always possible. The old saying "Rajakama nethnam Vedakama" is not truly applicable in modern society because this carries arrogance, rather than humility. Only a few politicians are national minded. Many are hungry for power and wealth. You and I have not deigned to choose that path; If you join the public service, most certainly you have to adhere to government policy - otherwise you have the freedom to go private. Having served several governments since Sri Lanka gained independence over five decades, I can say in all honesty and humility that I did not acquire a mite but a mighty experience of being Your Obedient Servant'. I was not a trade unionist though related to a giant one of yore. I had to fight my own battle for seniority and won it too late to enjoy it over those who had not worked as hard for merit. So, follow the spirit of the only right you have, which is your duty, come what may!

Your training is incomplete without internship, which today is such a shared duty, that it cannot be compared with our training when we were on call every other day. If you forgive me for saying this, I will tell you that I was on call for all the wards at the Lady Ridgeway Hospital for children and Lady

Havelock for women every other day. There were children having fits, intestinal obstruction due to intussusception or round worms on one side and women with ectopic gestation and even induced abortions on the other, to be attended to, single handed, late into the night even and in the wee hours of the morning. There were no SHO's or Registrars for support. But this experience I referred to earlier added up to a 'might' which helped in postgraduate training. You have to develop human compassion and realize that in our society this stands like a beacon of help to the under-privileged majority. You cannot always care, but pain and suffering can be alleviated. I was responsible for initiating Paediatrics as a separate subject in the final examination and subsequently it has evolved as a separate choice for internship. Scores of Paediatricians and four Professors of Paediatrics have undergone their training and they are now functioning with further insight and futuristic training in health care for the public and private sectors.

In the global scene, medicine has evolved with great speed in the last twenty years or so. There is a glittering array of technologies. Hippocrates, noble as he was, would have had to revise his oath, but the public still refer to it when they fault the medical profession. You would have to master the art of applying new technical skills and equipment to any special situation rather than wave those like magic wands for sundry illnesses. Make certain that you identify your need for this use with due consideration coupled with the patient's requirement and not merely for the fear of litigation and practicing defensive Medicine, thereby increasing the cost of health care to all.

Sri Lanka has need of you. I toured Jaffna, Mannar, Vavuniya and the East in my monitoring of Sri Lanka's certification in the background of global polio eradication. There were several retired re-employed medical officers doing their best, where permanent staff was not available, I was questioned in New Delhi in March this year by the international Regional Commission for polio eradication as to why the vacancies were not filled. They did not know the ground situation. However, I was happy to see a young pediatrician in the post which I served in Jaffna from 1956 - 1958. This same pediatrician was working with missionary zeal as he did in Trincomalee when I visited that area 2 years earlier.

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