

## **SPEECH NOTES**

Good morning and thank you for this opportunity to welcome you to New South Wales. In opening Day 2 of this Summit, it is appropriate for me to acknowledge the importance of your place in the continuing development of regional strategies for sharing knowledge, ideas, experience, information and when needed, health services.

This Summit is recognition of the critical importance of regional networks if we are to improve communications and ensure the best collective response to crisis intervention, management and pandemic preparedness.

The past 10 to 15 years have seen great advances in health care and health services. This progress has demanded major changes in the roles and practice of nurses and midwives as they provide health services across widely differing communities and populations.

The NSW Government is committed to ensuring a sustainable nursing and midwifery workforce for now and for the future. I am pleased to be able to tell you that the NSW Government has a number of strategies in place that have been successful in attracting and retaining nurses and midwives. The nursing and midwifery workforce in NSW continues to increase and as at September 2006 there were 6,744 more nurses and midwives in the public health system than there were in January 2002.

There are many related matters of concern that are not unique to NSW and the value of the work you will undertake at this Summit to many of the health systems in this region cannot be overstated.

One example is the worldwide need for pandemic preparedness and NSW, like all countries, is undertaking extensive planning. Hearing and learning from people with the experience of SARS and other large-scale disasters is an essential component of good leadership.

Being ready to meet the challenges that such disasters present demands knowledgeable, well-informed leaders who can rely on well established information systems, a responsive workforce and multi-sectoral collaboration.

The WHO World Health Report 2006 is appropriately titled “Working together for health”. In this report the late Dr Lee Jong-Wook, the former Director General of the World Health Organisation, identifies the theme common to both developed and developing countries..... the chronic shortage of well-trained health workers.

People are every organisation’s greatest asset and this philosophy is of particular relevance to health. I would like to quote from Dr Lee’s overview in the World Health Report, as I believe he captured the heart and spirit of health care.

*He said, “Health service providers are the personification of a system’s core values – they heal and care for people, ease pain and suffering, prevent disease and mitigate risk – the human link that connects knowledge to health action. At the heart of each and every health system, the workforce is central to advancing health”.*

I commend you on the framework for the strategic planning you have outlined and your commitment to networking to enable continued improvement in the standards of health services for the peoples of our region.

May I take this opportunity to thank you for your vision and to acknowledge the importance of your roles in fostering a greater understanding of the need and capacity to assist each other.

Whilst we have much to be proud of, and as I mentioned earlier we have more nurses than in recent times...

You've all no doubt heard there's a shortage of nurses. Currently we estimate we're at least 1,750 short in public hospitals alone.

So the work of our nurses is very much appreciated and I hope rewarding as well.

I spend a lot of time talking to people about values in our community. It's a concern that comes up again and again at the meetings I go to, the schools I visit and the in discussions I have with the constituents who talk to me.

A lot of people seem to think we've become a less caring community.

But working with the Health Minister I meet caring people every day. The NSW Health system is absolutely full of caring people, many of whom \* like all of you, from across the region, here today \* could have easily done something else.

In a climate of almost full employment, to meet people making the choice to continue to nurses and administrators, at the highest level, with teams of committed other nurses, is a reminder that the satisfaction we get from taking care of each other hasn't gone out of style.

I think part of the reason we suffered historical losses to the profession is that the contribution of nurses was taken for granted in our health system.

Nurses weren't paid enough largely because nursing was regarded as natural women's work and under-valued just as child care remains undervalued today.

I'm very pleased to be part of a government that has lifted salaries and improved professional pathways for nurses. I hope we can continue to improve the professional development available to our nurses as they progress through what I'm sure will be satisfying careers in the NSW health system.

Recently I think we've seen a positive policy shift that improves our recognition of the role nurses play in health care.

Maternity care is case in point.

While for a long time women were encouraged to seek increasingly specialised care \* especially if they have private health insurance \* the NSW hospital system is now offering midwife care to a growing number of mothers.

I'm currently looking forward to the birth of my second child in 5 weeks time, and my wife has chosen to have midwife only care.

As Parliamentary Secretary for Health I applaud her making the cost effective choice. Perhaps it's because she used to work for Treasury but I think more likely a reflection of the extraordinary quality of care we have come to rely on from nurses.

As the population ages and our health expectations continue to rise, the only way our health system is likely to remain sustainable is for nurses to take a more active role in clinical care.

The challenge for government and the health system is to offer professional and clinical pathways that achieve a real partnership and reward structure between you and us to help and make the best contribution you can to health care in NSW and across the region.

On behalf of the NSW government, and the whole community across our region, I want to say thank you for making our health your career.

I wish you a very enjoyable stay in this beautiful city and trust that your time here will be of benefit to you and your organisation.