

**Address delivered by Dennis de Peiza, General Secretary,
Congress of Trade Unions and Staff Associations of Barbados,
on the occasion of the
'Eunice Gibson Awards for Professional Growth and Development',
Hosted by the Barbados Nurses Association,
29 November, 2013, Bagnall's Point Gallery, Pelican Village,
Bridgetown**

I consider it a distinct honour to have been invited by the Barbados Nurses Association to address this Annual Eunice Gibson Awards for Professional Growth and Development.

Let me take this opportunity to recognize and congratulate the Barbados Nurses Association on the celebration of its 76th Anniversary. It is indeed the mother of all registered trade union and staff association bodies on the island of Barbados.

The founders of the Barbados Nurses Association and the subsequent leaders and members of the present and past Executive Committees, are to be commended on recognizing the dual role the BNA is called upon to play as the representative voice of nurses, and as a professional organization.

It is my observation that the BNA places at centre of its work, the professional growth and development of its members. It is therefore fitting that the Association has sought to use the Eunice Gibson Awards to direct and maintain the focus of its members on the vision of the organization, which you will recall, is to make

'The Barbados Registered Nurses Association, the premiere Nurses Organization in Barbados, with local, regional and international networks, to advocate for nurses and clients, providing leadership for quality health care.'

This afternoon I join with the members of this distinguished audience, in offering congratulations to the recipient of this year's awards. I have little doubt that Miss Eunice Gibson, the founder of this Nursing Association, were she alive and present, would have been proud of the fact that

recipient of the Award that bears her name, has emulated many of the qualities that she exhibited as a nurse leader.

When asked to address you this Awards Ceremony that falls on the eve of our nation's 47th Anniversary of Independence, I was informed that there was a preceding new members' seminar, held under the theme 'Getting Better Together with Purpose.' In engaging my mind on the focus of my address, I thought that it was better to address the wider membership of the BNA on the titled of the Eunice Gibson Award of that of 'Professional Growth and Development.'

As an educator, I have been trained that reinforced learning is ideal. Using that as my guide, I wish to remind you the members of the nursing fraternity, that the attainment of professional growth and development is contingent upon the demonstration of the exercise of good leadership, management and the pursuit of excellence.

In this day and age, where questions are being raised about the quality of leadership being exhibited, there is a responsibility place upon trade unions, staff associations and other civil society organizations to recognize the importance of promoting good leadership qualities amongst its constituents. It is about time that we recognize that there can be no decisive leadership where there is no vision, the absence of principles to guide our actions and behaviour, the lack of standards, and a disregard for the value system.

If we accept that leadership is not concentrated in one person, it is for us to come to grips with the fact that everyone is a potential leader, and at some time in their working life will be required to offer some form of leadership. It is therefore left to each individual to demonstrate the leadership qualities he/she has. Those who are leaders within the health care system must assume some responsibility for preparing leaders for the future. It is through the exercise of good leadership and management skills this can be achieved. Those who now assume leadership or management role ought to recognize the importance of delegating responsibility of task to other team members.

In the delivery of health care, nurses as we well know, generally work as a team of professionals. The assumption is to be made that at times, it is expected that individuals within the team, will be called upon to provide occasional leadership. This enables individual team members to take charge in areas where they are able to demonstrate their individual strengths and competencies. Given that professional growth and development cannot be isolated from education and training, it is advisable that every nurse practitioner avails him / herself of any training opportunity which lends to their personal and professional development.

Members of the Association should see it as important to attend training workshops, seminars and other fora that are sponsored or organized by the Association; every mindful of the fact that these contribute to enhancing their knowledge base, skills and competencies.

On the other side of the coin, it is to be expected that senior managers within the health care system will continue to be supportive of the efforts of the BNA, by facilitating requests for special leave made by rank and file members of the Association, who are either nominated, selected or invited to attend training.

While there is a tendency to focus on education and training as integral part of professional growth and development, it is important that attention is also paid to other critical contributing factors. I posit that it starts with members of the nurses profession arriving at an understanding of how they can work to get better with a sense of purpose.

I share the opinion that it starts with the development of a common identity. This identity is to be reflected through the sharing of a common interest. The point is to be stressed that as long as nurses develop an understanding of the mission of the profession, share a common vision and goals, then it is reasonable to expect that there will be the delivery of quality service.

It therefore follows that there must be a commitment on the part of each nursing practitioner to uphold the ideals and standards of the profession. Arguably, the upholding of patient confidentiality must be seen as paramount. Added to this would be the showing of respect generally for

the patients who are your customers, as well as their family members and friends. It ought not to be lost on any member of the nursing profession that respect is due to fellow colleagues within the health care system. These are not unrealistic expectations of our nursing professionals.

In turning my attention to the subject of standards, I take this opportunity to remind of the importance of the applications of these to the growth and development of the profession. The commitment to professional responsibility and accountability, to knowledge based practice, service that is client focused and to ethical practice should be fundamentals that ought remained etched in the minds of all nursing practitioners. It is hope that you would develop an understanding the relevance of your clinical education, administrative and research skills to the attaining these professional standards.

In accepting the profession is serious about its growth and development I hasten to remind you to be appreciative of the fact that the observance of professional standards cannot be taken lightly or for granted. My research tells me you should constantly be looking to better understand your professional obligations, to be supportive of initiatives that are directed at continuing competence and professional development, to always well positioned to explain what nursing is and what nurses do, to understand the role you have to play as advocates for changes to policies and practices, to be demonstrate the ability to be able to define and resolve professional practice problems, and last but in no way least, make every effort to participate in nursing education courses/programs.

To add to these fundamental standards, the furtherance of the growth and development of the profession invariably depends on the development of a sound reputation by all nursing practitioners, and of their ability to develop and maintain good working relationships. These are challenges that must be overcome, if on the one hand the profession is to maintain its image and integrity, and on the other, is able to build a platform that promotes team work; where there are ongoing efforts to find innovative ways to manage changing health care needs.

The challenge is therefore thrown out to members of the nursing profession to recognize that they have an individual responsibility to make a contribution to the growth and development of the profession. You may best do this, by looking at how you can contribute to the creating of a new vision for the future. Inasmuch that this nation of ours is faced with the crisis of caring for the growing aging population, maybe the profession can look at how it can respond to meeting the health care needs of persons in this group.

At a time when the health care system in Barbados is under immense pressure, it requires that nurses and doctors as the health care professionals draw upon their expertise in helping to find workable solutions to current financial crisis. Politicians cannot be lead to believe that they have all the answer. If this is thinking was allow to be perpetuated, it can certainly be viewed as an indictment of the professional competencies and capabilities of nurses under the BNA, and its sister labour union organizations. It goes further, as this would also apply to the doctors who fall under the umbrella of the Barbados Association of Medical Practitioners (BAMP). The valid input of these organizations ought to be garnished. This in itself would speak volumes of the professional growth and development of these organizations.

In switching my attention from the apex to the entry point into the profession, there is a need to strongly inculcate the nursing values and standards in all new entrants to the nursing profession, as a means of entrenching in them an understanding of what is required for advancing growth and professional development of the profession.

There is a need to guard against some indifference that is seemingly creeping into the profession. Collaboratively, the leadership of the BNA, and the nursing tutors at the Barbados Community College, should undertake to educate all entrants to the profession, of the difference between a profession and a job. Trainee nurses must be made aware that professionals are required to show commitment and dedication to the vocation, demonstrate a sense of loyalty, an understanding of the importance of team work, the need to give quality care and attention, a recognition of the importance of confidentiality, and the need for remaining of the cutting edge of the nursing practice through education and training.

In the absence of proper mentorship of junior staff by their seniors, there is the likelihood that the furtherance of professional development and growth will be constrained. The profession therefore needs to do a serious introspection of what is happening within its own ranks. The profession would best be served if this starts at the level of the individual member. You may wish to ask some basic questions, which include but are not limited to.... Do I care about this profession? Is it just about job security? Do I reflect the right attitude that is required to my work? How responsible am I? Am I often punctual and /or absence?

This brings me to tying together the ideas of professional development and growth and getting together better with purpose. I suggest to you that the common trends that run through these, would be the creating of a vision for the future, the need to improve the quality care that is provided so as to move beyond what the public expects of you as professionals, and to observe the importance of team work; which is fundamental to your overall performance as professionals.

As members of the BNA, I implore you to work with the leadership of your Association to help it to develop, promote and execute an agenda that is intended to contribute to both growth and professional development. In so doing, it is important that at the levels of the Executive Committee and its constituents, there is an understanding of the organization's structure, function and culture. In addition, importance has to be attached to training, the building of professional relationships, the sharing of information with others, developing a professional identity and areas of expertise.

Colleagues and friends, I believe that we all understand that at the personal, organizational and professional level, the stagnation of growth and development will occur where there is no serious individual and/or collective effort to do what is required to make the profession the best it ought to be. As we live in a world where there are three constants in life, these being change, choice and principles, let's accept that these will always inform and guide what we do.

I invite you to reflect on the words of the great India leader, Mahatma Gandhi, who history record to have said,
“Be the change you wish to see.”

As you worked to achieve growth and professional development, I suggested to you that you follow the advice of John Baldoni, and I quote,

“Inspiration emerges from purpose, knowing what you do and why you do it. Organizational purpose emerges from the vision, mission and values of the organization.”

As we proudly celebrate our 47th anniversary as an independent Barbados, I urge all nurses to recommit and redouble your efforts, so as to advance the professional development and growth of your chosen profession. Your successful efforts will enable citizens, residents and others to benefit from the quality health care services which you are expected to provide.

Thanks again to you Madam President and your Executive Committee for inviting me to be your feature speaker, and I hope that I have lived up to your high expectations.

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