

**Convocation of the
Cooperative Research
Centre for Aboriginal
Health,**

Closing Address by CRC – AH Chair

Pat Anderson

Alice Springs Convention Centre

April 7 2005

I want to start by once again acknowledging the owners of this country and thanking them for their hospitality and generous welcome to this beautiful place.

This morning Pat Ansell-Dodd one of the senior traditional owners of this country came back to the Convocation to offer to take a tour of Alice Springs with any interested delegates.

As it happened, our busy agenda prevented Pat's kind offer from being taken up but her offer illustrated to me the warmness of the reception we've received from the mob here.

It demonstrates the positive relationship that the CRC has built with Alice Springs people and is a wonderful indicator to me of the benefits to the CRC and our partners from putting in the work of relationship building with Aboriginal communities across this country.

One of the things that have struck me repeatedly over past two days is the enormous commitment and dedication shown by so many of the people here in attendance.

What a remarkable group of people we have attracted to this CRC.

People like Helen Evans and Fran Baum.

Both of these women have been key allies of ours in establishing this CRC.

Both have been recently appointed to important positions at the international level of health policy development.

Our congratulations and best wishes go out to both of you.

The quality of our partners was also demonstrated by the wonderful Western Desert Choir.

Their performance was a highlight of this convocation for me not just because of the beauty in their voices but because they represent the strength and resilience of our people.

Their efforts to improve the circumstances of their lives through working together and identifying a home grown solution is inspiring.

They demonstrate the spirit of self-determination in developing health policy for Aboriginal people.

Unfortunately the response to their efforts from so many agencies also demonstrates the intractability of the problems that Indigenous people still confront in Australia.

For rather than welcoming an initiative that would lead to improved life quality for the Alice Springs dialysis community the response from many politicians and bureaucrats to ridicule the idea of community-based dialysis.

It'll never work, said the naysayers

But those men and women from the Western desert knew that their idea was good and would help people so they persevered and yesterday we saw and heard the story of their success.

In that story is the crux of the challenge that faces us.

We need to recognise the capacity of Aboriginal people and ensure that the research we produce is useful and available to the people in whose interests it is created.

We need to continually re-acknowledge the skills and tenacity of our people and encourage that above all else.

Thank you to the Western desert Choir for such a beautiful illustration of this truth.

I came to this convocation satisfied that we had satisfactorily bedded down at least four of our program areas but felt that we needed to finalise the Social and Emotional Health program.

After hearing the reports on that program I am now confident that we are on the right track with all five program areas.

This convocation has reinforced in me the strong sense that the role of men in contemporary Aboriginal society and the continued resilience of our Aboriginal families are critical areas of work that must be supported if we are to succeed in

turning around the terrible mental health costs of colonialism.

I pay respect to the work of Dr Alex Brown in the area of men's health and believe that we need to start identifying and collating other successful men's programs across the country.

I am also very pleased that we have a review of training and education and that finally we getting some intellectual grunt applied to this area.

Our people are amongst the most trained and least employed people in the world and changing that reality is one of our most critical challenges.

Finally I want to say that this convocation has been one of the most open and friendliest conferences I have attended and I thank you all for your contributions.

I think one of the reasons for this is that we made a conscious effort to support each of the Core Partners to bring their own local research partners....from community and industry with them to the Convocation.

That meant most of you arrived with a group of people you already knew, trusted and had good strong relationships with. It's the foundation we need to build on for our networks of interest.

Finally, some thank yous..

I'd like to thank all of you who have taken on roles as facilitators and presenters – you are an inspiration and a pleasure to work with.

I'd also like to thank my fellow Board members who've been here, particularly those who've presented sessions – Stephanie Bell at the SME Forum on Tuesday, and Shane Houston and Vivian Lin over the past two days.

I've already mentioned Pat Ansell-Dodds, who fitted so well into the CRC family.

Thank you too to Dr Peter Toyne, for joining us last night....

I'd like to thank the Convention Centre staff, who've made everything so easy for us...and particularly the technical support crew. This has been one of the few conferences I've attended where there haven't been continual problems with the sound or powerpoints....

And of course, to Mick and his staff for pulling all this together....

Mick, you had plenty to do without stepping in at the last minute to become MC...and I think you won a lot of people's respect yesterday when you showed how much the Western Desert mob's story had touched you.

Ian Anderson, as usual, for providing the leadership and vision to guide our research programs.

And to Sue and the support staff...Judy and Johanna from Melbourne University, Candy, Di, Sarah and Leah from the CRC office in Darwin...Annette from Menzies, and particularly Shirley Godwin from Latrobe...who I'm pleased to announce will be taking on an even greater role in the CRC as a program manager. To all of you, thank you for running such a professional, slick and trouble free show.

Finally, thank you to all of you who have participated so enthusiastically, and with such deep commitment.

It renews my energy to be with such a group, and I thank you all and wish you a safe journey home.