



for client, [Nancy Maltby](#), C.O.O., Middlesex Hospital Alliance

“I’ve had lots of positive feedback on my speech. I love your writing style. It’s beautiful. Thanks again. I’m grateful.”

presented to graduates of Fanshawe College programs in Health Sciences and Nursing

Where Technology Meets Humanity

Thirty-plus years ago, I was where you are today. I was a Fanshawe College graduate (in Nursing), it was 1979, and I was standing in your shoes – although mine likely had 3-inch platforms. That was the height clearance for bell-bottom pants. Dr. Rundle had arrived here just before me, in 1972. Coming full circle, he’ll now enjoy his well-earned retirement. Thank you, Dr. Rundle. With other thanks today, let me also acknowledge members of the platform party, distinguished guests, and graduates.

Dr. Rundle, for you and I, and for many parents here, the 1970s had its own vibe, its own technology. As new-age as we thought Pac-Man games and push-button phones were, who could imagine the advancements today’s graduates will benefit from? Well, maybe the Star Trek fans imagined it. And even though science hasn’t beamed us up yet, it absolutely propelled us forward. It gave our global village a whole new dance – one that’s a delicate balance of technology meets humanity.

As health and wellness graduates, you may be new to the dance floor, but you already know that the best moves are when humanity leads, and technology follows, keeping time – granted, it’s usually the quick step.

I’ve certainly felt technology’s shift – impacting the patients’ experiences, the lessons learned, my own career.

I remember my very first lab at Fanshawe – hand-washing. Ironic. Despite today’s gadgetry and efficiencies, hand-washing is still as vital. I like that. It’s a comforting constant. I like knowing that the basics of best-practice remain part of the continuum, the curriculum. And when the curriculum needed me to do an essay, it was hand-written, every other line. If I made a mistake, I had to strike it out and initial it – ‘whiteout’ wasn’t allowed. Neither were typewriters, but they were scarce, anyway.

After my convocation, I entered the work world with a toolkit of just three survival items: a pen, nursing scissors, and a watch with a second hand. My job interview consisted of a phone call – rotary dial, if I recall – to the employer, a personal meeting where we chatted only briefly, and mainly about my mother’s fine work as a nurse, then closed on a handshake commitment, hiring me if I’d promise a similar level of my Mom’s stellar work ethic. So, although it was my own competencies that became my track record, the opportunity was thanks to reputation. Guard your own reputation voraciously – online as well as in life. Honour your academic as well as your emotional intelligence – the reputation and distinct brand that is ‘YOU’ – your unique presence.

It’s that “quality of our presence”, as Dr. Gillian Kernaghan calls it – that most impacts the patient’s experience. While technology’s more about outcome, it’s humanity that shapes their journey, their experience. That quality of presence is our relationship, voice, the words unspoken. Patients don’t read our charts or tablets – they read the look in our eyes, they relax to a reassuring touch.

There’s no denying, though, that it was also the evolution of equipment and policy that was a vast improvement for patients. Take their first responders. Then called Ambulance Attendants or Drivers, they were restricted to a ‘pick-up/mop-up’ role – stop the bleeding, stabilize the body position, and transport. Thankfully, you’re now valued as the vital life-savers you are – Paramedics – reviving heartbeats with the skill and knowledge that was formerly, in years past, the exclusive domain of physicians. And you do it all while en-route to hospital!

Monitoring is easier, too. Blood pressure used to require a doctor’s visit. Now, it’s measured casually in a drug store kiosk, or on an affordable device you may personally own. Blood sugar also can be tested at home, and often, without need of a requisition and lab test. Dialysis can be done at home, unassisted, even as you sleep – no more driving for hours to specialized clinics.

Surgeries streamlined – gall bladders, for instance. Thanks to laparoscopic technology, hospitalization has gone from 14 days to 4 hours. When I was a nursing student, cataracts were a 7-day stay. We had to sandbag the patient’s head because he mustn’t move at all until day 4/5, and even then we could only log-roll him. Now, cataract clinics are in shopping malls. It’s 7 minutes, not 7 days. So theoretically, a patient today can have both surgeries and be home that afternoon – glad to be rid of the gall bladder, cataracts, and definitely the recumbent log roll. And he’s reclaimed precious time – about 480 extra hours enjoyed out of hospital and in the comfort of his daily interests and loved ones.

Time. As it passes, I find it's become a bridge, connecting the knowledge I found at Fanshawe to the before-and-after lessons of technology. Let me close by sharing a few as stepping stones.

Before, patients did as they were told, comforted, thankful. Treatment was a monologue and considered the gospel. It wasn't negotiated, and I don't ever recall a 2nd opinion. Then, the Internet – that's when the shift really hit the fan.

Patients are now often called health care consumers, and the right-to-challenge is an accepted standard. They demand dialogue, they question, and they have easy access to medical information – but that sword's other edge is the abundance of misinformation. The lesson this taught me is the value of evidence-based care. Patients' questions deserve that we be accurate, current, and willing to say, "let me check on that, just to be sure".

'Let me check' is a dynamic lesson, too, because it reminds us that learning is ongoing and a lifelong commitment. And I'm confident that the learning curves you face with each new technology will be comfortable for you, because you've grown up with it. You embrace it. Know also that, if your career path hits an unfortunate curve, circumstance may take away a job, but no-one can ever take away your education. Be proud of your education, your achievement, forever yours.

As you move onto life's dance floor, know that you take more than a pen-scissors-watch toolkit. Your success is expansive, thanks to two immeasurable gifts – roots and wings. Parents and families blessed you with your roots and, in many cases, gifted you this fine education – so thank you. And, now a Fanshawe Falcon, you have wings. Fly. Dance. Thrive as the healer you are, and may you live in the epicenter that is 'wellness' – where technology meets humanity.
