



**Address by Public Protector Adv Thuli Madonsela during the
University of Limpopo's graduation ceremony in Pretoria on Friday,
May 18, 2012**

**Chairperson of Council, Judge Justice ML Mailula;
Vice Chancellor, Prof NM Mokgalong;
Deputy Vice Chancellor, Prof MM Sibara;
Registrar, Mr R Naidoo;
Other members of the University management;
Our guests of honour;
Members of the media;
Members of the public;
Distinguished guests;
Ladies and gentlemen**

It is an honour and privilege not only to speak at this occasion but also to bear witness as our young medicos earn their stripes, preparing to go out there and make a difference in our people's lives.

I would like to thank the management of the University of Limpopo for the invite. Most importantly, I am thankful for the opportunity to utter a few words of encouragement to the graduates.

Given the many years of study that you have endured, making it this far is truly a milestone. I can't begin to imagine how proud you and your loved ones must be feeling this morning.

More so, because you are graduating from the University of Limpopo, Ga-Rankuwa campus, the former MEDUNSA. This institution, and this campus in particular, has a rich history of preparing minds that eventually become inspirational leaders that we are all proud of.

To mention but a few, the list of prominent alumni from this campus include the late and current Deputy Ministers of Health Dr Molefi Sehularo and Dr Gwen Ramokgopa respectively.

I am also informed that Professor Sam Mokgokong, President of the Health Profession Council, studied here too many years ago.

It was Dr Mokgokong, who, alongside respected Professor of Neurosurgery, Robert Lipschitz, led a team that made that historic separation of Siamese twins, Mpho and Mphonyana more

than 25 years ago, leaving the whole world in awe.

But, over and above these leaders, this campus produces -on an annual basis- many unsung heroes and heroines that save lives daily in our health sector, particularly the public health sector. Some of you will soon join them to ply your trade in that sector, providing much needed quality healthcare to our people.

I am sure you will all do us very proud in that regard. After all, the motto of your university is: *"Finding solutions for Africa."*

This brings me to the theme of my speech today. I was asked to speak to you on the *"Importance of Ethical Conduct."* I was further requested to help instill in you a culture of ethical public service.

As I was preparing for this address, I remembered one of the matters my office dealt with in recent years, involving the conduct of medical personnel at a public hospital.

It was alleged that the Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital in Johannesburg had failed and refused to disclose to family members the cause of death of their loved one, Mr N. Sixty-one-year-old Mr N. had been admitted to hospital for a minor operation. He passed away a day after the operation.

Nursing staff at the hospital contacted the family to inform them about the death of their loved one but did not explain what actually happened to Mr N. during the operation and the actual cause of his death.

When Mr N's son went to the hospital to inspect the body, he discovered that his father's left leg had been amputated and also noticed a gaping hole on his stomach. The family had not been forewarned about the seriousness of the operation and the condition of the corpse. They were shocked and traumatised by the gruesome discovery as Mr N. had only been admitted for a minor operation.

Our investigation found that even though Mr N. had been admitted for a minor operation, he developed complications that justified further surgical interventions. However, the hospital failed to inform the family about the cause of death or offered any form of counseling. As a result the family was exposed to a traumatic experience of seeing the deceased's body in the condition it was.

We also found that the hospital had failed to offer an explanation or apologise to the family until they were approached by the media. We were of the view that the hospital had an obligation to communicate with the family soon after the death and provide them with a full explanation on what happened.

Remedial action that had to be taken going forward was that the hospital had to implement its own undertakings in line with the Health Professions Act, 1976 by ensuring that sufficient and relevant information is provided to patients and/or family members on issues such as the nature of their condition, the complexity of treatment, the risk associated with the treatment or procedure and the patient's own wishes, as well as the healthcare practitioner's rights and obligations to take decisions on behalf of the patient.

The hospital also had to ensure the disclosure of information after a patient's death to interested

parties in compliance with the Health Professions Act, 1976; the National Health Act, 2003; the Ethical Rules of the Health Professions Council of South Africa; the National Patients' Rights Charter; and the Professional Association's Code of Conduct.

Why am I citing this case and how does this relate to you as young professionals who are about to render a public service? The answer is quite simple. Good ethical conduct is one of the things that are going to ensure that you have a fulfilling and successful career.

Going into the public service, I am sure you have all heard of Batho Pele, a regime aimed at instilling good ethics, morale and pride in public servants to encourage the culture of providing quality services and being responsive to the people's needs.

Batho Pele lists a number of service standards that public servants must adhere to when dealing with the people who they serve. But adherence to these standards also affects the way public servants relate with their colleagues, suppliers and other partners.

As you go out there to render public services, remember to demonstrate good ethical conduct. Remember to take pride in what you do and demonstrate the culture of Batho Pele by adhering to service standards while respecting all those that you come into contact with as part of your work. Also adhere to the other regulations such as the laws that govern your professions.

Ladies and gentlemen;

You have spent quite a number of years working towards this day. However, to borrow from former President Nelson Mandela, after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. As you grow older, life becomes challenging. Nevertheless, do not let the challenges of life deter you from realizing your goals.

You have already climbed many trees to get where you are and the power of dreams has sustained you through your university journey, including times when you may have considered quitting.

Use the memory of your previous successes to power your efforts in the face of the challenges you will face in your post-graduation life.

Now that you have earned your stripes, go out there and play a meaningful role in making South Africa work. You must join other patriotic South Africans that are making the constitutionally promised 'better life for all' possible.

Do not ask what South Africa can do for you but rather what role can you play to make South Africa work according to the dream underpinning our constitutional architecture. Remember, life's rewards do not necessarily go to the fastest but to the most persistent. Go out there and make a difference. South Africa's future is in your hands.

As I have already indicated, you are part of an essential machinery of scarce skills that often determines whether people live or die and that the power they hold in this regard should be exercised ethically.

As you go out there to make a difference in people's lives, particularly in the public health system, the important question that should inform your ethical conduct should be how you would treat people.

You are part of South Africa's most informed generation by virtue of being participants and beneficiaries of information age. Take advantage of this and use it to deliver the constitutional dream of a better life.

Congratulations to you all.

Thank you.

Adv. T.N. Madonsela

Public Protector of the Republic of South Africa