Speech

Address By

Her Excellency the Honourable Quentin Bryce AC CVO
Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

On the occasion of

Official opening of the ACSA National Conference

Rydges Lakeside Hotel, Canberra
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Thank you for your warm welcome. I am delighted to join you at the opening of your 40th General Meeting and 9th Annual general meeting, and to give a welcome of my own to those of you who have travelled far to attend this important forum, particularly delegates from New Zealand, here for the South Pacific Meeting.

It gives me great pleasure and pride to offer Australia’s hospitality to you.

I am also proud, as Patron of the Australian Council of Stoma Associations, to acknowledge the splendid work of this national scheme.

You enable people to create full and flourishing lives after their stoma surgery. You help them to find ‘a beginning, not an end’ in this life-changing procedure.

You provide support and advice, advocacy and representation, access to resources and services, the reassurance and connectedness necessary for building a happy and hopeful life.

And looking beyond our own needs, your Australia Fund extends help to our near neighbours in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, assisting ostomates in these developing countries, improving their health and wellbeing as well as our international friendships and links. I commend you in this fine work.

My friends, your gathering here is an opportunity to reflect on what you do, on how far you have travelled since your establishment here in Canberra in 1970, and what endures at the heart of your endeavours, what carries you forward.

I know that a great many people have contributed to the success of the association over the years. National office-bearers like Vice-President Peter McQueen, Secretary Ed Webster, and Treasurer Peter Lopez.

Beside them and behind them, a host of others, volunteers and helpers in the 22 associations across Australia.

But I want to make special mention of a fellow Queenslander, Gerry Barry, for the work he has done for ostomates in Australia and overseas for more than four decades.

He has made an enormous contribution in this area of voluntary work. President of Queensland Stoma Association since 1970; Vice-President of ACSA for five years during the early 1990s, and president of ACSA since 1997.

It is fitting that he was made a Member of the Order of Australia in 2008 for his voluntary services across 40 years.

No less important is what his story exemplifies about ostomates. Being an ostomate has not stopped him leading a full and active life. Mr Barry rose through the ranks of the Tax Office after having had surgery, and still practices part-time as a tax agent in Brisbane.

And what is true for him is true for the great majority of your members, people who have recovered from often severe illness and the trauma of surgery to lead energetic and dynamic lives.
I want you to know how highly I regard your courage, your resilience, and your determination. You are examples in your communities, and in our society.

I came across another example recently. British columnist Virginia Ironside writes with great frankness and humour about her experience as an ostomate.

According to Virginia, it’s impossible to get public figures to talk about their bags, though many must have them

“Celebrities,” she says, “will yammer on about their false legs, their heart bypasses, dialysis, alcoholism, drug addition, you name it: but when it comes to bags, the subject is a no-no.”

She is not shy about hers. She confesses to looking around for brightly coloured ones with designer spots, trying to escape the inevitable flesh pink.

And though she dreaded the operation and looks forward to the reversal, she says that life with a bag is not so unlivable as she had feared.

I have no doubt this is the discovery that each of you has made in your own time, at your own pace. Even if the designer bags continue to be elusive.

My friends, it has been my great pleasure to share this morning with you, and officially to open the 2009 Conference of the Australian Council of Stoma Associations.