Military Veterans Transitioning to the Role of a Civilian Nursing Student
A Focus Group Study

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Phenomenon: Transitioning

Military Veterans Transitioning to a Student Role in a Civilian Nursing Program

- Military Veterans earning a degree in nursing impact the nursing shortage -Military & civilian sector civilian employment opportunities
- Joining Forces campaign -HRSA funding Veterans Bachelor of Science in Nursing (VBSN) programs

Objectives
- Gain understanding of Military Veterans transitioning to the role of a nursing student in a civilian nursing program.
- Identify obstacles and barriers.
- Promote and enhance successful completion and minimize attrition for Military Veterans pursuing a VBSN.
What is the lived experience of Military Veterans transitioning to the role of a nursing student in a civilian nursing program?

- Phenomenological approach Giorgi (2009).
- Focus group interviews
- VBSN students (N=17)
- Interviews conducted by a moderator
- Note taker - captures dynamics and details
## Participant Demographics (N=17)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Medical Technician</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<tr>
<td>13-15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Navy</td>
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Preparation by Default

Military Veterans strive to be prepared. Failure is not an option. They are committed to follow through and put forth 110%.

“It was preparation by default…Once you commit to something, you’re going see it through…l’m going do 110%.”
“Failure is not an option…It’s school not Afghanistan.”

**Focus:** Organization, The Move
**Conflicts:** Time, Resources, Family
**Feelings:** Determination, Confidence in Success
Making Sense

Military Veterans are making sense of their new environment, role, and the program. Questions arise: Who can I relate to? What is a nurse? What are my resources? What is the structure?

“I thought...that it was going to be like kind of para-military and that’s not what it is.”

"Understanding the nurse’s role... a humbling experience."

Focus: Assessment
Conflicts: Knowledge, Relationships
Feelings: Confusion, Frustration
Drawing the Line

Military Veterans incorporate information to clarify scope of practice, environment, and structure to balance military and civilian roles.

“Know where to draw the line...where I stood”

“The biggest thing was trying to figure out what I can and couldn’t do...my first semester I was not able to start IVs and then go do my weekend drill and I was doing sutures.”

Focus: Clarification
Conflicts: Adaptation, Attitude
Feelings: Acceptance, Resistance
Military Veterans support each other regardless of the branch, rank, or semester in school.

“I think for the next cohort...we’d have the Facebook thing - the communication thing.”

“For the most part, we all get along. ...cohesion – nobody left behind.... if they’re struggling with something, you’ll have 6 or 7 people (MV’s) offer to help them out.”

**Focus:** Support  
**Conflicts:** Communication, Disconnect  
**Feelings:** Connected
Discussion

• Conflicts consistent throughout knowledge, communication, relationships, resources

Literature Search
Vygotsky – Social Development Theory

• Point of Transitioning: Knowing where to draw the line.

• Military Veterans had a personal drive to succeed; however, a key to their success was the bond and support from fellow MV’s regardless of branch or rank.
Implications for Practice

• Supports the importance of resources for Military Veterans transitioning to civilian nursing schools.
• A workshop or webinar would be helpful to outline the process to prepare for school and help define various roles, differences, and expectations.
• Most valued was the Military presence.
• Peer support and mentoring may prove to be the key to success.
• Future research is needed to further explore the experiences and conflicts of Military Veterans transitioning to civilian nursing programs

• Acknowledgements
  • To our men and women in uniform ...past, present, & future
  • Omicron Alpha Chapter STTI
  • United University Professions
  • Charles and Emma Randall Endowment
  • University of South Florida, College of Nursing
  • College of Central Florida, Ocala
Focus Groups
Focus Groups

• An approach to collecting qualitative data
• Conversation transcripts, field notes of interactions / non-verbals
• Participants – purposeful
  • homogeneity balanced with diversity
  • 6-12
    • Too small – pressure, silence
    • Too large - not fully expressed

• Environment –
  • distractions
  • timing
  • comfort (quiet snacks)
The Art of Listening

Activity
Choose a partner
Discussion topic – Holiday Cooking
First will state a sentence
Second will respond with a sentence beginning with the last word in the first person’s sentence.

Example:
Person#1: The snow is heavy today.
Person #2: Today will be hard to drive on the streets.
Person #1 Streets with hills need more salt.
Focus Groups

• Team – moderator, note taker, manager
  • Augments the interview
• Interview Guide – 12 questions
  • Data redundancy – saturation
  • Participant fatigue
• Stay focused
  • Do not invite question at the beginning of the focus group
  • Overview of topic – purpose
  • Ground rules - cell phones, confidentiality
  • Icebreaker (casual – travel, pets) – rapport – more likely to speak again
• Be Prepared – review strategies
  • Anticipate distractors
  • I hear what you are saying about_, but what about_?
  • Some participants shared_. What do you know about_?
  • Has anyone had the same experience? A different experience?
  • Thank you, John. Are there others who want to comment on the question?
• Debrief after each session – modify interview guide
Questions
Thank you