Personal and Professional Transition from Military to Civilian Nursing Practice

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Faculty Disclosure

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Session Goal & Objectives

To discuss the military nurse officer transition from military nursing to civilian nursing practice

- Discuss the phases of transition military nurse officers progress through upon leaving military nursing practice and entering civilian nursing practice
- Identify organizational strategies within their organizations to assist military nurses in the transition
Acknowledgements

- Active duty military women and men
- Veteran nurses who participated in this study
Military and Veteran Culture

- Mission driven
- Teamwork
- Structure and rules
- Camaraderie
- Distinct hierarchy and rank
- Frequent moves
- New assignments
- Accountability
- Deployments
- Separations from social supports
Purposes

1. To examine and describe the transition process of active duty military nurses from military nursing practice to civilian nursing practice.

2. To identify barriers and facilitators to this transition.
Study Design and Sample

- Qualitative descriptive

- Sample = 10 nurse Veterans (3 male, 7 female)
  - 1 Navy
  - 3 Air Force
  - 6 Army
Procedure

- IRB approval
- Purposive/snowball sampling
- Semi-structured interviews
- Data analysis
Themes

- Separating from Military Life
- Conflict and Chaos
- Shifting Sands
- Personal and Professional Reconstruction
Separating from Military Life

“I was nervous, you know, just because they kind of hold your hand in the Army ... this is how we do everything ... they hold your hand through the whole process and going into the civilian world I was really scared about the whole idea of having to apply for a job, and meeting new people, and have to learn how to do a new job.”
Conflict and Chaos

“It was like an identity crisis. I had known myself as, you know, Captain XX, the officer. The Army nurse...So I struggled with that, losing that title. You had identified yourself with that name for so long and then all of a sudden it's not there anymore. I remember feeling that I was kind of losing a sense of my identity.”

“I just felt like we could just not exist and nobody would know, there was just no community ... I just felt invisible”
Shifting Sands

“I know how to do this, I did this in the military, I’m really good at this, and just because that wasn’t how they did things, it was just kind of shot down to the point where I stopped offering other skills.”

“taking those leadership qualities mastered in the military and applying it to a new setting”
Personal and Professional Reconstruction

- “standards governing the quality and prioritization of nursing care remain unchanged between civilian and military nursing practice.”

- “increased need of self-motivation to rise within the ranks of civilian nursing, which is built into the life-cycle of the Army nurse. Pursuing future education, increased competency and leadership must be on the civilian nurse themselves. In Army nursing, the rise within the life-cycle, is addressed in evaluations. A civilian nurse can stay in the exact same place for more than a decade.”
Figure 1. Military Nurse Transition to Civilian Nurse

- Making preparations
- Stepping out of the known
- Flight of feelings
- Unrealized obstacles

Separating from Military Life

Conflict and Chaos
- Stepping into the unknown
- Culture shock
- Grief & loss
- Navigating a new system

Shifting Sands
- Letting go of rank
- Reality of not wearing the uniform everyday
- Learning to fit in
- Reevaluating expectations

Personal and Professional Reconstruction
- Finding comfort & reassurance that patient care is patient care
- Accepting changed identity
- Taking charge to set a new course

Civilian Nurse
Facilitators

- Exit counselling
- Civilian checklist
- Staying in touch with military friends
- Talking about the transition
- Using family support
- Seeking out and confiding in other veterans
- Transition Assistance Program
Barriers

- Civilian healthcare providers not understanding veteran’s past experiences
- Differences of culture and values
- Decrease in pay
- Perception that leadership skills did not translate to civilian nursing practice
- Residual mental health issues
- Staffing issues
Recommendations

- For military leaders
- For future military nurses
- For healthcare organizations who employ military nurse Veterans
Discussion

- First known study to investigate this transition
- Other work-role transitions
- Collectivism versus Individualism
- Military and leadership training
Implications

- Two transitions simultaneously occurring
- Veteran identity never goes away
- Effects of deployment can linger for many years
Limitations

- Context dependent
- Only one Navy nurse
- Varying amounts of time from separation to interview
Conclusions

- Transition could be complicated by events that occurred in military service.
- Military nurses are an asset to the civilian workforce.
- More research is needed related to this area of nursing practice both in the U.S. and around the world.
QUESTIONS ?