

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



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Introduction

Military Veterans earning a degree in nursing will impact the nursing shortage in the Military and the civilian sector. A career in nursing will benefit Military needs and services and help provide job opportunities once returning to the civilian workforce. In response to the Joining Forces campaign, 31 Schools of Nursing received HRSA funding to develop Veterans Bachelor of Science in Nursing (VBSN) programs.

Project Objectives

The primary objective of the study was to gain understanding of Military Veterans transitioning to the role of a nursing student in a civilian nursing program. Secondary objectives are to identify obstacles and barriers, add to the current development of VBSN programs, and promote and enhance successful completion and minimize attrition for Military Veterans pursuing a VBSN.

Research Question

What is the lived experience of Military Veterans transitioning to the role of a nursing student in a civilian nursing program?

Method

Focus group interviews involving VBSN students (N=10) took place Spring 2017. Data analysis followed a descriptive phenomenological approach as guided by Giorgi (2009). Interviews conducted by a moderator were audio-taped. A note taker was present to capture additional observations during the sessions.



Knowing - Where to Draw the Line

Military medics and corpsmen face various challenges while transitioning to the role of a civilian nursing student. Each role is defined by its unique structure, relationships, and scope of practice. Balancing the two roles requires knowing where to draw the line for what you can and cannot do. Once established, Military Veterans were more open to learning the role of nursing. In turn with no one left behind, Military Veterans helped their fellow colleagues with understanding "the line" to ensure a smoother transitioning to the role of a civilian nursing student.

Preparation By Default

Military Veterans strive to be prepared. They are committed to follow through and put forth 110%. Failure is not an option.
Focus: Organization, The Move
Conflicts: Time, Resources, Family
Feelings: Determination, Confidence in success

"It was preparation by default...Once you commit to something, you're gonna see it through...I'm gonna do 110%."
"Failure is not an option...It's school not Afghanistan."
"We prepare! We prepare! We prepare!"

Drawing the Line

Military Veterans incorporate information to clarify scope of practice, environment, and structure to balance military and civilian roles.
Focus: Clarification
Conflict: Adaptation, Attitude
Feelings: Acceptance, Resistance

"know where to draw the line...as time progressed I kind of knew where I stood and what I could do"
"Understanding the nurse's role... a humbling experience"
"That's a huge deterrent for people when they think they are in charge of others when everyone is on the same slate."

Making Sense

Military Veterans are making sense of their new environment, role, and the program. Questions arise: What is a nurse? Who can I relate to? What are my resources? What is the structure?
Focus: Assessment
Conflict: Knowledge, Relationships
Feelings: Confusion, Frustration

"I thought ...that it was going to be like kind of para-military and that's not what it is."
"The biggest thing trying to figure out what I can and couldn't do...my first semester I was not able to start IVs and go do my weekend drill and I was doing sutures."
"my scope of practice is by the semester I'm in"

No One Left Behind

Military Veterans support each other regardless of the branch, rank, or semester in school.
Focus: Support
Conflict: Communication
Feelings: Connected

"Learn from the previous cohort."
"I think that for the next cohort they need to work together as a team...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 offer to help them out, walk them through stuff."

Participant Demographics

Gender		Title		Years of Service	
Male	9 (90%)	Combat Medic	3 (30%)	4-6	3 (30%)
Female	1 (10%)	Flight Medic	1 (10%)	7-9	2 (20%)
Age		Hospital Corpsman	1 (10%)	10-12	4 (40%)
18-25	3 (30%)	Medical Technician	3 (30%)	13-15	1 (10%)
26-30	4 (40%)	Other	2 (20%)	Semesters Completed	
31-35	3 (30%)	Rank		0 (newly matriculated)	0 (0%)
Branch		E-4-E-6	9 (90%)	1	4 (40%)
Air Force	4 (40%)	E-7-E-9	1 (10%)	2	5 (50%)
Army	4 (40%)			3	0 (0%)
Navy	2 (20%)			4	1 (10%)

Discussion

Data analysis revealed four key themes each with three sub-themes. The key themes follow in sequence from preparing to enroll in a civilian nursing program to participating as a college student. Sub-themes were found consistently within each of the key themes centered on the focus, conflicts, and feelings.

The over arching theme was knowing where to draw the line. This was the point of transitioning to a civilian nursing student.

The focus remained a constant while the feelings and conflict may be influenced by knowledge, relationships, and resources. MV's had a personal drive to succeed however; a key to their success was support from fellow MV's regardless of branch or rank.. "We are like-minded people."

Implications for Education

This study supports the importance of resources for Military Veterans transitioning to civilian nursing schools. As one participant suggested, 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. Some conflicts were identified. Future research is needed to further explore the experiences and conflicts of MV transitioning to civilian nursing programs.

Key References

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Acknowledgements

To our men and women in Uniform
...past, present, & future

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