

## **Innovations in Clinical Education: Joining Forces with Community/Public Health Nursing Students in Veterans' Healthcare**

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### **Description**

This presentation describes an innovative approach to enriching nurses' knowledge of uniqueness and best practices associated with caring for Veterans and their families.

### **Purpose**

Veterans share similarities with the general population but have unique cultural, demographic and health needs. Undergraduate VA Nursing Academy faculty for Community/Public Health Nursing clinical groups secured placements with the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), a Navy base, a Head Start facility serving military families, and a program for homeless Veterans. These placements provide a service learning opportunity, strengthening learning of population-based health approaches in general and Veterans' healthcare in particular.

### **Significance**

Recent conflicts have characteristics (multiple deployments, use of National Guard &/or Reserves, increased traumatic brain injuries) increasing the need for Veteran's services. Many Veterans seek care from community-based providers, making it critical that all nurses are educated on Veterans' healthcare.

### **Strategy and Implementation**

Students receive information on military service and specific Veteran issues across a historical continuum, connecting specific conflicts with unique health issues. A 'webquest' activity is used where students take on the role of home care RN; explore the internet for resources for a Veteran and family and process findings. Students attend Operation Stand Down, Rhode Island (OSDRI), where they assist homeless Veterans in activities aimed at meeting health, social & personal needs.

### **Evaluation**

Students join with clinical instructors in debriefing at the end of OSDRI and complete a Critical Reflective Journal, providing further reflection on the day's activities. Student themes include the therapeutic nature of 'telling your story', the value of screening for military service and 'seeing' humanity in someone experiencing homelessness.

### **Implications for Educators**

Direct experience with the Veteran population develops clinical skills and transforms student attitudes about Veterans and their unique circumstances, with emphasis on homelessness.