

## VETERANS AFFAIRS NURSING ACADEMY (VANA)

The VA Nursing Academy (VANA) was a 5-year pilot, consisting of partnerships between 18 VA facilities and 16 Schools of Nursing. VANA was established with the primary purpose of establishing and enhancing nursing academic partnerships, replicating and building upon the medical model of shared faculty and shared trainees to reap the value of such sustained partnerships.

The partnerships have enabled the development of Veteran-centric curriculum revisions focused on specific needs of the Veteran and family, as well as innovative practice and education initiatives that have facilitated positive patient outcomes. VA and College faculty have successfully met VANA program goals by developing the structural and process platforms to enable Veteran-focused nursing education and practice innovations. Examples of such contribution for the care of American's Heroes in the areas of PTSD/TBI, Education/Awareness, Homelessness, and DoD collaboration are described below.

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### PARTNERSHIP EXEMPLARS

#### Education Initiatives

**Partnership: Adela Lutz VA Saginaw Medical Center, Saginaw Valley State University**

**SME: Barbara Johnson**

Designated Education Units (DEU) have been established, incorporating Quality and Safety as core curriculum components. The DEU is defined as a single or a cluster of nursing units developed into a teaching/learning community through collaboration among nurses, other disciplines, management, faculty, and students. There is an increased awareness among faculty of the Veteran-specific health care issues, such as post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury; which results in revision of curriculum.

**Partnership: VA Ralph Johnson Medical Center, Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) College of Nursing**

**SME: Gail W. Stuart, PhD, RN, FAAN**

A chapter on "The Military and their Families" is included in the 10th Edition of the widely used psychiatric nursing textbook, *Principles and Practice of Psychiatric Nursing* (2013, Elsevier, St. Louis), authored by VANA faculty. Faculty believe this new revision is the only psychiatric nursing textbook currently published to include such a chapter, and it was a direct outcome of the VANA partnership.

**Partnership: VA Connecticut Health Care System, Fairfield University School of Nursing**

**SME: Sadiann Ozment, RN, MPH, CHES**

VANA Program Director, who is a Vietnam Veteran, has authored a chapter on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in a simulation learning textbook and is in the process of authoring a chapter on PTSD in a mental health textbook focused on aging Veterans. The VANA Program Directors are partnering with

other researchers in a study exploring PTSD and the end-of-life experience in the geriatric Veteran population.

### **Polytrauma and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Initiatives**

**Partnership: Aleda E Lutz VAMC, Saginaw Valley State University College of Nursing & Health Sciences**  
**SME: Barbara Johnson, RN, MSN (Saginaw)**

The Aleda E. Lutz VA Medical Center in Saginaw Michigan and Saginaw Valley State University VA Nursing Academy partnership created a series of simulation scenarios that highlight a female Veteran with PTSD. The authenticity of the simulation scenarios was enhanced by incorporating current literature and gaining invaluable input from a woman Veteran who understood PTSD and its impact. She assisted with script writing and this allowed the simulations to unfold into very authentic patient care encounters. The same woman Veteran volunteered her time to portray the role of a woman Veteran with PTSD and several other medical conditions. The nursing students at the university enjoyed interacting with the Veterans during these simulations. Most importantly, they learned how to realistically interact and deliver care to a female Veteran patient with PTSD.

**Partnership: James Haley VAMC Tampa, University of South Florida College of Nursing**  
**SME: Lucille Raia, RN, MS, CNA-BC**

VANA faculty have participated in caregiver and staff educational programs with the goal of supporting the caregiver of Veterans with polytrauma injuries and traumatic brain injuries in raising emotionally healthy and secure children. Pediatric Nurse Practitioner VANA faculty have collaborated with VA staff in developing a series of classes to meet the needs of caregivers and children. One program is entitled *“Effects of Trauma on Kids and Families.”* Childrearing and parenting issues were discussed using a cognitive and developmental framework to help the caregivers understand the needs underlying their children’s behavior and learn how to appropriately manage this behavior.

**Partnership: VA Pacific Islands VAMC, University of Hawaii at Manoa School of Nursing & Dental Hygiene**  
**SME: Mary Boland, PhD, RN**

VA faculty at the VA Pacific Health Care System (VAPHCS) have partnered with Tripler Army Medical Center (TAMC) and the University of Hawaii at Manoa School of Nursing and Dental Hygiene to participate in a comprehensive revision of the nursing program curriculum. The new curriculum will focus on multi-generational family units through the life cycle. These family units include the major ethnic and cultural groups that the College serves in the Pacific, as well as Military family units. The Veteran will be the focus of study, and the curriculum will incorporate the complexity of Veterans’ war experiences with common medical-surgical, obstetrical, pediatric, and psychiatric events, to include post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury.

**Partnership: Birmingham VAMC, University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Nursing**  
**SME: Kimberly Froelich, PhD, RN**

Birmingham VA VANA Faculty has developed an educational program for VA clinicians and trainees focused on the Mental Health needs of the Veteran. Specific problems addressed are traumatic brain

injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and psychiatric illness along with therapeutic interventions appropriate to each problem. The program is available on CD to facilitate easy access and widespread distribution through the facility and college.

**Partnership: Edward Hines (Chicago) VAMC, Loyola University Chicago, Marcella Niehoff School of Nursing**

**SME: Sharon Zandell, BSN, MS, PhD**

This VANA partnership has created a *Military Assessment Tool* that is used by all students in the Veteran assessment process. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury, and suicide risk are addressed in the curriculum didactically, as well as taught through patient assignment. Sensitivity to the potential for co-morbidity as adjuncts to primary medical or surgical diagnoses is taught throughout the educational process. The curriculum includes independent review of the causes of PTSD, with the emphasis on the military experience. Each student is required to complete and present a military assessment focusing on indications of PTSD and subsequent patient behavioral outcomes.

An annual conference for non-VA, community based Chaplains is coordinated with the Chaplain Service and EES to provide necessary information for those providing pastoral care to returning Veterans. Topics discussed include the physical and emotional issues that returning OEF/IEF Veterans encounter, with focus on PTSD and suicide risk.

**Partnership: Ralph H. Johnson VAMC, Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) College of Nursing**

**SME: Nancy Duff, RN, MSN, CEN**

An interdisciplinary team of VANA faculty, physicians, and nurse practitioners developed nurse-led groups in the inpatient mental health unit. This team developed a program to manage health needs and prevent recidivism using the Collaborative Assessment and Management of Suicidality (CAMS), Illness Management and Recovery (IMR), and the Critical Time Intervention (CTI) methods. System redesign and implementation of a new process for interdisciplinary psychiatric treatment rounds significantly reduced readmissions, saving over one million dollars.

**Partnership: VA San Diego Health Care System, San Diego State University School of Nursing**

**SME: Carole F. Hair, PhD, APRN, BC**

*Warrior to Soul Mate: Reclaiming Your Relationship after Combat Deployment.* VANA faculty participate in this weekend program designed to help couples grow in their relationship building. Couples practice specific skills during the weekend focused on emotional literacy, confiding, listening, problem solving, and constructive conflict resolution for building and maintaining intimacy, practical knowledge, and strategies and attitudes for sustaining positive marriage and family life. Approximately 30 couples have enrolled in the program. Many participants commented that they now had the skills to continue to work on their relationships. Even those who could not maintain their relationships commented on how smoother the separation went and how they were able to maintain a working relationship to enable ongoing interaction with their children.

**Partnership: North Florida/South Georgia VAMC, University Of Florida College of Nursing**

**SME: Robin Riffie, MSN, RN, NEA-BC, CPHQ**

The North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health System facility at Gainesville and the University of Florida have revised curriculum to support a Veteran-centric focus, as well as hiring faculty with military experience. The partnership has recently appointed a nursing faculty member who had served on active duty in a combat Air Force Para-Rescue program. He was decorated during his service commitment with the Distinguished Flying Cross, the USAF Medal, and the McKay Trophy for extraordinary heroism and self-sacrifice during the rescue of the pilot of a downed US Navy F-14 Tomcat in Iraq during Operation Desert Storm (1991). This faculty member displays the integral respect for the service of all Veterans, as well as modeling the vast options in career opportunities for all new nursing graduates within the military and the VA.

**Veteran Focused Initiatives**

**Partnership: John D. Dingell VAMC, University of Detroit Mercy School of Nursing**

**SME: Margaret Freundl, APRN, BC**

The VANA Michigan partnership of the John D. Dingell VA Medical Center and the University of Detroit Mercy has collaborated with the Detroit Mercy College of Engineering to develop both a multidisciplinary education program and an engineering nursing team. This team identifies and works with Veterans needing a customized device to enable full participation in desired activities. The engineering and nursing team begins the design process with a recognized need, through problem definition and specification, culminating in a complete design package to include assembly drawings and part prints. Engineering students focus on technical details, specifications, marketability, and usefulness of the product. Nursing students evaluate the potential client's physical, emotional, and mental health needs throughout the design and implementation phase. A recent project produced a unique assistive device that enabled the Veteran to stabilize devices such as cameras so that he can perform activities he enjoyed prior to his injury.

**Partnership: James A. Haley VAMC, University of South Florida College of Nursing**

**SME: Lucille Raia, RN, MS, CNA-BC**

The James A. Haley Veterans Hospital (Tampa) and the University of South Florida College of Nursing VANA faculty and the VISN Palliative Care team are working together to educate community hospice staff on the end-of-life needs of Veterans. Last year, the Hope Hospice in Tampa cared for approximately 500 Veterans. The VANA faculty has developed and implemented seminars to educate Hospice staff on military culture and the effect of a stoic culture on acknowledgement of pain needs and willingness to ask for assistance for comfort measures. As a result of this outreach, VANA faculty have been asked to present this seminary to Ft. Myers Hospice staff. Since Veterans needing palliative care are commonly care for in the community, this outreach of the VANA faculty and the VISN Palliative Care Team is providing the education necessary to enable comprehensive, focused, patient-centered, and respectful care to Veterans as they approach the end of life.

**Partnership: Adela Lutz VA Saginaw Medical Center, Saginaw Valley State University**  
**SME: Barbara Johnson**

VANA nursing students helped launch a registered student organization for military Veterans. The group evolved out of the recognition of student nurses that Veterans have a special, shared culture and that integration into a campus community can be difficult. The Cardinal Military Veterans is for Veterans, families, and supporters of the military who are also connected to the university. One of the members stated that Veterans have shared experiences that are different from the experiences of the non-Veteran students on campus. This group allows Veterans and their loved ones a way to connect with each other and give each other support in the classroom, socially, and personally. The group has provided color guards at football games and invited other Veterans from the community to sporting events. They have become proactive in reaching out to serve the needs of Veterans and their friends and family within the university community. The organization's membership has continued to grow since being launched 2 years ago and now has over 70 members.

**Partnership: Providence VA Medical Center, Rhode Island College of Nursing**  
**SME: Bonnie Dinwoodie, MBA**

VANA faculty are members of the VET Success on Campus program. The purpose is to encourage and support Veterans to be successful in their educational and career endeavors. There are 200 Veterans in the program with approximately 50 inquiries per month.

### **Homelessness Initiatives**

**Partnership: John D. Dingell VAMC, University of Detroit Mercy School of Nursing**  
**SME: Margaret Freundl, APRN, BC**

The VANA Michigan partnership of the John D. Dingell VA Medical Center and the University of Detroit Mercy has initiated Veteran Standowns for Homeless Veterans on Belle Island in Detroit. Standowns are modeled after a practice of the Vietnam War to provide safe retreat for units returning from combat operations. The Veteran standowns are one- to three-day events that provide services to homeless veterans such as food, shelter, clothing, and health screening. VANA students and faculty have recently participated in a standown this October, serving approximately 1500 Veterans. Their work in this Standown included participating in Veteran health screening and education, as well as serving as group leaders facilitating Veteran attendance at each support station.

**Partnership: VAMC, Western Carolina University School of Nursing**  
**SME: Davina Dietrich, MS, RN**

VANA students developed community service projects specific to Homeless Veterans. Projects include a resource compendium for Shelter Workers, education for shelter staff, and initiation of monthly resource meetings held at homeless shelters with the goal of identifying and sharing resources for the Veteran.

**Partnership: VA Ralph Johnson MC, Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) College of Nursing**

**SME: Amelia Joseph, MBA, RN**

The Operation Hydration initiative was designed to address the hydration needs of the homeless Veteran population in the greater Charleston area. It was designed by VANA students with guidance from the VA-MUSC faculty partnership and was designed to help homeless Veterans locate potable water sources, especially during the summer months. Students provided education to the Veterans on the signs and symptoms of dehydration and heat stroke. Educational materials were provided to local churches, which have sustained the project after the student semester ended.

This initiative provided much needed resources to improve homeless Veterans hydration status, resulting in a decrease in emergency department visits for dehydration and heat stroke.

VANA faculty and students continued to work with community partners to develop this program at the community level, with local churches maintaining and sustaining this initiative.

**Partnership: VA Ralph Johnson MC, Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) College of Nursing  
SME: Amelia Joseph, MBA, RN**

This was the development of a community garden project for the homeless women veterans of Crisis Ministries, a local non-profit agency that provides food, shelter, and hope to homeless. The goal of the project was to promote mental and physical wellbeing in homeless women veterans to enhance overall health and quality of life through the establishment of a community garden. Some of the students' activities included establishing partnerships with local agencies, garden expansion and grooming, and assistance with rain collection system to serve as a water source. Near the end of the semester, an educational brochure, planting guide, and cooking demonstration were presented where the women learned how to prepare a healthy vegetable stir-fry, the prices of fruits and vegetables compared to fast food, and physical and mental health benefits of gardening. Gardening items were donated from Lowe's and a local farm. Further expansion of the garden project the following semester included the partnership and establishment of Share our Strength's Cooking Matters program in conjunction with Low Country Foodbank, inclusion of herbs into the garden and inside planters, and education.

**Military Culture and Support Initiatives**

**Partnership: John D. Dingell VAMC, University of Detroit Mercy School of Nursing  
SME: Margaret Freundl, APRN, BC**

The VANA Michigan partnership of the John D. Dingell VA Medical Center and the University of Detroit Mercy is participating in the Leadership Training Course at Ft. Knox, Kentucky to better understand and support their Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) students. The Leadership Training Course is an intense 4 week introduction to Army life and leadership training of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps for college students, typically between their sophomore and junior years. The Dean at the University of Detroit Mercy is participating in the Educator/Influencer Visit. This 5-day program gives educators with little or minimal knowledge of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps an initial understanding of the Corps, and the training required of all Cadets. The Dean observed the training of ROTC students and participated in select training exercises. Educators will have an opportunity to rappel off a 50' tower and jump off a high dive blindfolded while holding a rifle over their heads. Throughout the visit, the Dean had opportunities to talk with cadets, hear what students are learning, to understand what has

motivated these students to explore a military career, and observe a Cadet graduation. Additionally, a visit was planned to Ireland Army Hospital to meet with Army nurses and discuss career opportunities. An outcome goal of these activities is to stimulate interest in the development of Centers of Influence on college campuses for ROTC and to encourage students to consider careers in the military as an Army officer.

**Partnership: VA San Diego Health Care System, San Diego State University School of Nursing**  
**SME: Carole F. Hair, PhD, APRN, BC**

VA Nursing Academy (VANA) faculty at the San Diego Health Care System have partnered with the Naval Medical Center San Diego and the Naval Hospital Camp Pendleton to teach the Trauma Nurse Core Course (TNCC) to Department of Defense (DoD) and VA nursing staff. The Emergency Nurses Association (ENA) developed and implemented the international TNCC as a means of identifying and disseminating a standardized body of trauma nursing knowledge. These are new national standards with a minimal number of qualified instructors available. The VA faculty agreed to teach at the DOD facilities provided VA staff could also attend free of charge. With this agreement in place, five TNCC courses have been taught at both Naval Medical Center San Diego and Naval Hospital Camp Pendleton. Additionally, positive professional relationships have been initiated and maintained by all involved in this seamless exchange of expertise and knowledge for the greater good of service men and woman as well as our Veterans.

**Partnership: Oklahoma City VAMC, The University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center College of Nursing**  
**SME: Brenda Skaggs, BSN, MS, PhD**

Military students comprise 20% of the 2010 cohort for the Oklahoma City Veterans Administration Medical Center and the University Of Oklahoma College Of Nursing Veterans Affairs Nursing Academy. Active duty Navy and Air Force, as well as U.S. Reserve Air Force members are participating in this program. The VA facility in partnership with the College has provided a mechanism to enable the military students to participate in a ten-week summer externship, which is a component of the Transition to Professional Practice Program. This program includes a ten-week summer extern program inclusive of didactic programs provided by College and VA faculty and clinically supervised programs for students. Participation and completion of the externship will provide valuable clinical skills in Critical Care and Operating /Surgical Services. The students indicated in a focus group that their chosen area of practice when they return to the Air Force and Navy as professional registered nurses is Critical Care and Operating Room/Surgical Services.

**Partnership: Providence VA Medical Center, Rhode Island College of Nursing**  
**SME: Bonnie Dinwoodie, MBA**

VANA students receive clinical training at the Newport Naval Clinic. This provides a unique learning opportunity regarding military culture, with the goal of developing competencies associated with specific population health. This training site provides an opportunity for student to incorporate into their competencies a level of sensitivity and capacity for working with individuals and families serving in the Military.

**Partnership: VAMC, University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Nursing**  
**SME: Kimberly Froelich, PhD, RN**

The University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) School of Nursing Board of Visitors approved in October a \$35,000 gift to the Board of Visitors Endowed Veterans Care Scholarship. This is the Board's third major investment in the fund and brings the scholarship total to \$145,000. The Board of Visitors made the decision to create a scholarship to promote military nursing education in 2007 after learning of the Birmingham VA Medical Center and the UAB School of Nursing's VA Nursing Academy Partnership. This scholarship was identified by Dr. Eagerton, the VA facility Associate Director for Nursing and Patient Care Services as being "one of the collateral outcomes of the VANA program that will exist for generations." The first scholarship recipients will be named in early 2012.