

NURSE EDUCATION AND THE MILITARY VETERAN

No occupation is more dangerous than serving in a nation's armed forces, where service-personnel may face atrocious conditions and events. Some experience mental health problems including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression and anxiety. The spouse and children are exposed to frequent moves, and endure long periods separated from a partner or parent.

Nurses are well placed to make a substantial difference in the care of veterans and their families, although many Veterans believe healthcare professionals "*cannot understand*" their experiences (Finnegan et al, 2017). To change this narrative, the UK has introduced a new under-graduate educational initiative.

An initial single site pilot study was undertaken at the University of Chester, England in 2017. The aim was to produce educational sessions that provided student nurses with an insight into the Armed Forces Community (AFC) of serving personnel, veterans and their families, and construct an understanding of the biopsychosocial needs aligned to their care, health and wellbeing. The intent was to stimulate critical thinking to focus on the individual and family needs by encouraging a problem solving approach.

The educational programme includes a flipped approach where students prepared by examining if they had an AFC family connection such as a grandparent in World War 2. They then were afforded an opportunity to present this relationship. There are quizzes, vignettes, classroom and blended learning. The sessions embrace technology and include online information resources, apps, Talking Heads, and video presentations (Finnegan et al, 2018). Students have access to a growing number of online lectures and will soon have an opportunity to join online discussions. Creating free online mediums presents a chance to share this information with the clinical workforce, welfare agencies and AFC beneficiaries.

The sessions are being evaluated to determine the students' views regarding relevance, and then using these recommendations to proactively develop the format. The pilot evaluation results strongly indicated that students' value and want this training. In addition, there is an on-going qualitative study to identify the strengths and areas for development with students utilised as co-researchers. This insight will be triangulated with quantitative data to improve validity and reliability.

By creating a military focus across Higher Education Institutions, there is a chance to build a workforce that is empowered to provide the optimum care to the AFC. This also has the potential to promote research and community good will. The initiative is being extended to other UK Universities, and there is scope to inform other multi-disciplinary groups and global collaboration. The initiative working group includes international partnerships in the US and Australia in Sydney and Adelaide Universities. It is envisaged that the sessions will positively enhance the wellbeing of military veterans and challenge long standing issues aligned to stigma.

Finnegan, A.P., Brownsell, M., Steen, S., & Templeman, J. 2018. Evaluating the Needs of the Armed Forces Community. *University of Chester*. At: <https://www.chester.ac.uk/health/crivw>
Accessed 21 March

Finnegan, A.P., McGhee, S., & Leach, J. 2017. Educating Nurses to Provide Better Care for the Military Veteran & their Families. *Nurse Education Today*. 54, 62-63