A Semester of Global Health & Human Diversity Among United States Veterans in Rural Utah

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Background
Patients and health care providers in rural communities face a unique combination of factors which create disparities in healthcare when compared with urban areas, such as economic factors, cultural values, reduced rates of formal education, lack of recognition by legislators, and isolation.

There are more veterans per capita in rural than in urban areas. Health care for the rural population is coupled with the unique challenges of caring for veterans. Because of this, we chose to devote a semester to the study of improving health care to the rural veteran population.

Learning Objectives
• Gain a better understanding and appreciation for the service rendered by our U.S. Veterans
• Identify the unique challenges facing rural veterans and providers who care for them
• Immerse ourselves in rural and veteran culture

Learning Activities
• Spent clinical hours in the rural towns of Panguitch, Fillmore, and Tooele, UT
• Participated in panel discussion with rural veterans in Kanosh, UT
• Traveled to Washington, D.C.
  - Visited the Walter Reed Army Medical Center and the Veterans Administration War Related Illness and Injury Study Center
  - Met with panels of military nurses and veterans to discuss the nuances of veterans’ health care
  - Met with our congressional representative and discussed veterans’ issues and policy

Nursing Implications
“Listen to them, be compassionate, and do as best you can.”
Cpt. Williams, RN

“Ask them about their stories. The more they tell it, the easier it is to tell. And humor: always, always keep a sense of humor.”
Cpt. Smith, RN

“Now you going to really understand what they’ve been through. But just listen, with an open heart and an open mind.”
Lt. Roberts, RN

“There are some that are very angry. They’ll cuss at you. You have to let them know you’re there to care for them.”
Cpt. Williams, RN

Outcomes
• Gained a greater knowledge of the specific challenges related to veterans’ health care in a rural setting (lack of access, limited resources, and increased traveling time)
• Learned of veterans’ legacies, thereby cultivating greater respect for them
• Learned specific communication techniques to use with veterans, thus impacting our future nursing practice