Cultivating an Understanding of U.S. Veterans: Our Honored Patients

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Objectives

- Learn how to better care for the veteran population
- Increase our understanding of the diverse culture associated with veterans
- Develop a greater sense of gratitude and patriotism

Care of Veterans

As nursing students, we specifically chose to devote our time to learning how to better care for the veteran population. We worked with veterans as we traveled to Washington, D.C. and completed clinical experiences in Utah. These experiences greatly altered our perspective toward the armed forces and our appreciation for our nation’s freedom.

Washington, D.C.
- V.A. Medical Center: War Related Illness and Injury Study Center (WRIISC): Worked with patients who have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Walter Reed Army Medical Center: Worked with patients who have amputations
- War Memorials: Researched our nation’s conflicts and visited with veterans

Utah
- George Wahlen V.A. Medical Center: Worked in physical therapy, occupational therapy, and psychiatric therapy
- Harmony Home Health and Hospice: Worked with veterans in their homes
- Veteran Panel in Kanosh, Utah: Visited with WWII and Desert Storm veterans

Diversity of Veterans

As we met with veterans, we learned how truly diverse and unique they are. They are not bound by age, location, or race, but rather by their service and love for our country.

Common health care issues related to international conflicts:

**World War II (1939-1945)**
- Diseases of aging, including cardiovascular disease, cancer, dementia, Alzheimer’s disease

**Korean Conflict (1950-1953)**
- Diseases of nuclear warfare and cold injuries, including cancer and neuropathies

**Cold War (1945-1990s)**
- Diseases of nuclear fallout including various types of cancer

**Vietnam War (1964-1973)**
- Diseases of tropical origin, including effects from Agent Orange
- PTSD and depression

**Gulf War and Desert Storm (1990-1991)**
- Diseases related to depleted uranium and new immunizations
- Ongoing research is needed

**Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom (2001-Present)**
- Effects from improvised explosive devices, including blast and shrapnel injuries
- Scope of needs still being evaluated

Gratitude for Veterans

- Experienced a paradigm shift in our feelings toward the veteran population.
- Realized increased confidence in our ability to relate to veterans
- Gained a deep appreciation for veterans’ service.
- Felt an increased desire to serve veterans and express appreciation for their service.

Outcomes

- Learned how to better care for veterans through our diverse cultural experiences.
- Increased our knowledge of health risks specific to the veteran culture.
- Gained a greater appreciation for those who have served our country and protected our freedom.

Reference: www.va.gov/oaa/pocketcard/default.asp

“I have never before worked with patients more willing to welcome me as a student. They genuinely wanted to help me succeed.”

As I have begun to realize the magnitude of their sacrifice, my respect and appreciation has grown.”

“Our nation honors her sons and daughters who answered the call to defend a country they never knew and a people they never met”

Korean War Memorial