

A Needed Forward Vision....

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This special issue of the *Journal of Health and Human Experience* deals with a partial solution for two longstanding problems in healthcare. The first problem is our chronic shortage of nurses; the second, our failure to recognize and employ the training and abilities of our medics and Hospital Corps in civilian healthcare.

The shortage of nurses has been a problem as long as I can remember, and the situation is likely to get much worse in the near future. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that we will need over 200,000 additional new RNs each year through 2026, a number that US nursing schools have been unable to supply.

The underemployment of medics and Corpsmen is similarly frustrating. The armed forces train personnel to meet military needs, and, regardless of the length or intensity of training, if ex-service members do not fit neatly into a civilian category, they are unemployable.

Fortunately, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) has provided grants to Schools of Nursing to recruit, train and mentor former members of the armed forces medical units to become Registered Nurses. The foresight of this program is remarkable. These young men and women are special. They have volunteered to serve and have served successfully in austere and hostile locations around the globe. They are young, energetic, idealistic and filled with the desire to continue to serve. What better candidates could we ask for to advance healthcare as human care?

The reports from the Schools of Nursing that received these grants are detailed in this issue of the Journal. They make fascinating reading. Too often academic grantsmanship is about no more than getting money. But these schools are different; they were willing to adapt themselves to meet the needs of their veteran students. Some schools instituted faculty boot camps, others appointed special mentors for their military students, and still others devised procedures to grant academic credit for military medical training.

The transition to academic life is difficult for many of these young men and women. Their introduction to adult life and their world view was formed by their military training and experience. They think of success in terms of mission accomplishment through teamwork rather than individual academic achievement. Some have faced their own mortality in combat. Some are more comfortable in a fox hole than a lecture hall. Some have PTSD and jump at every loud noise. Others have sudden flashes of anger they cannot control. They often have little in common with their classmates who are younger and sometimes seem lazy and immature. But they are filled with a dogged determination to succeed. And they will.

Postlude

I know this because, long ago, I was one of those veterans. I served as a Hospital Corpsman in a Marine reconnaissance unit in Viet Nam. One day, late in July 1970, after a prolonged patrol in enemy territory, I received orders home. One week later I was discharged from the service and one month after that I entered college. The transition was abrupt, and I felt out of place. My body was in college, but my mind was still in the military. A kindly professor recognized what was happening and took me aside. The essence of his counsel was both simple and direct, “You were in the military but now you’re in college. That was then and this is now.” I took his counsel to heart, applied myself to my studies and three years later entered Yale University School of Medicine.

I succeeded because of the habits I acquired during my military service: hard work, focus and determination. And the veterans of today will succeed for the same reason. The Schools of Nursing whose reports are published here are to be congratulated for facilitating the transition and success of this new generation of young healthcare professionals.

