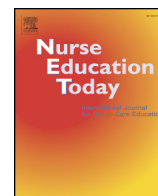




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Educating nurses to care for military veterans in civilian hospitals: An integrated literature review

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ABSTRACT

Background: In the UK, military veterans will receive care by civilian nurses in civilian hospitals. We propose that the nurses providing this care require an understanding of the unique experiences and specific health needs of veterans to deliver evidence-based care.

Aim: To conduct an integrative review of published literature to explore how nursing programmes prepare nurses to care for the military veteran population in civilian hospitals.

Review methods: A systematic search was undertaken of a range of electronic databases, Google Scholar and hand searching of Military and Veteran health journals. Papers that focused on education of civilian nurses about veteran health and included primary research or description of practice-based innovations were included in the review.

Results: The search generated sixteen papers that were focused on nurse education in higher education institutions. Several papers focused on simulation as a teaching method for veteran-specific health issues or curriculum developments with educational innovations such as online courses. Six papers focusing in continuing professional education of nurses in the clinical setting were included as supplementary information. All papers reviewed were US focused and dated between January 2011 and September 2015. Our search concluded that there is a gap in knowledge in this subject area within a UK context, therefore our review includes UK background information to support the US findings.

Conclusion: Civilian nurses need educational preparation to understand the specific needs of veterans. Educational institutions in the US have responded to nationwide initiatives to undertake that preparation. More empirical studies need to be undertaken to develop, test and evaluate educational innovations for preparing students and nurses delivering care to military veteran in civilian healthcare settings.

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1. Introduction

To understand how the care of military veterans is being incorporated into (civilian) nurse education and training in educational institutions, we undertook an integrative review of published peer-reviewed publications. It is difficult to assess the number of veterans who require nursing care in the United Kingdom (UK), as there are no accurate figures on the number of (military) veterans in the overall UK population. The most comprehensive data is derived from survey extrapolation. In its household survey the Royal British Legion estimated that there are 2.83 million veterans living in the UK, accounting for 4.4% of the population (The Royal British Legion, 2014). These figures compare with estimates of 3.6 million derived from the Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey (Woodhead, 2009). On the other hand,

the United States (US) has been collecting data on its veterans via the national decennial censuses since 1840 (Richardson and Waldrop, 2003) and the most recent analysis shows that there are 21.8 million veterans in the US (United States Census Bureau, 2015), approximately 6.8% of the overall US population.

In the UK, veterans represent a very heterogeneous group with the government adopting an inclusive definition whereby veteran status is applied to anyone who has served for a day in Her Majesty's Armed Forces, and there is some evidence to suggest that even those that have served for a short period of time may have issues relating to vulnerability (Buckman et al., 2012; Pinder et al., 2012). The mental health of veterans is an area that has also attracted media attention and has been subjected to scrutiny. Contrary to many media reports, epidemiological research suggests that there is no evidence of an 'impending bow wave' of mental illness amongst veterans (KCMHR, 2014) although some groups are at higher risk, especially reservists and those regulars that have been deployed in a frontline combat role.

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There is also a growing concern about increased physical morbidity in younger veterans, where improvements in body armour, tourniquets and medical evacuation mean that even the most gravely injured are surviving, where this would have been impossible only a few years ago (Fossey and Hacker Hughes, 2014). The Armed Forces Covenant (Ministry of Defence, 2011) states that ex-Service personnel should receive the same standard and access to care as any other UK citizen, which includes both physical and mental healthcare support. This intention has recently been strengthened by an explicit inclusion in one of the guiding principles in the NHS constitution (Department of Health, 2015).

The largest age-band of UK veterans, is those that are 65 + years, (3.17 million) and this comprises approximately 28% of the overall 65 + years UK population (Age UK, 2015). The proportion of military veterans increases significantly as many males in the older age-bands have served in historical conflicts (WWII, Korean War etc.) or undertaken National Service. As older people currently account for 45% of all in-patient episodes in general and acute hospitals (Parsonage et al., 2012) it is inevitable that nurses working in either of those settings will come in contact with people that have served in the UK military at some point in their working career.

The nurses providing care for veterans requires an understanding of the specific health needs of this group of patients if they are to deliver evidence-based care (Miltner et al., 2013). While nurses who work in veteran specific healthcare facilities may have the training and understanding of veteran-specific healthcare needs, the challenge is to prepare nurses in civilian hospitals and primary care settings to also understand and recognise veteran-specific care requirements.

The NHS provides universal healthcare and, as a rule, veterans should receive treatment alongside other patients. Recent policy changes following conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have led to the development of 'veteran-specific' mental health and prosthetic services (Murrison, 2010, 2011) within the NHS. This has not been accompanied, however, by a requirement of nurses working in those specialist areas to undergo formal nurse educational or training programmes to care for the specific healthcare needs of veterans. In the US the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) provides care to veterans and their families across healthcare domains in the US although it has been suggested that just over a half of veterans are cared for through this system (Lee et al., 2013). There have been several US initiatives to address the issue of veteran care in civilian healthcare systems including 'Have you ever served in the military?' and 'Joining Forces'. The latter is an effort to establish awareness of military culture and standardise care across the US health system (Convoy et al., 2013). 'Have you ever served in the military?', the American Academy of Nursing (AAM) initiative, raises nursing and other healthcare worker's awareness to reinforce the need for the education of nurses who work in civilian settings about military culture and military specific health conditions, to enable them to deliver appropriate care to military veterans (Collins et al., 2013; Convoy et al., 2013).

2. The Review

2.1. Aim of the Study

The aim of this integrative literature review was to explore how nursing programmes prepare civilian nurses to care for the military veteran population in civilian hospitals.

2.2. Method

An integrative review was the chosen approach to the topic of educating nurses to care for military veterans in civilian hospitals. This approach supports the selection and incorporation of published literature of research that may be empirical, non-empirical or theoretical (Kirkevold, 1997; Whittemore and Knaf, 2005). This contrasts with a

systematic review which typically groups and critically appraises empirical research using the same method (Conner, 2014). Similar to both types of reviews, however, is the structured, methodological approach in the conduct of the review (Conner, 2014). In the current study the structured approach is detailed in the following subsections.

2.2.1. Literature Search

A comprehensive search to identify applicable literature for inclusion in the review was undertaken. The search included a variety of databases, hand searching of reference lists and specified journals as outlined in Fig. 1. The search terms focused on 'Veterans or Military Veterans' and 'Nursing Education' or 'Nurse and Education' and 'Care'. In our scoping of the literature we tried the inclusion of terms around pre-registration and undergraduate nurse education with our search terms but did not find any papers, similarly we had a lack of success in identifying papers when we used the NHS or UK with our search terms and removed this term from our search. Papers were included if they were written in English and published by September 2015. Papers that focused on the education of nurses about veteran-specific health care to be delivered in civilian settings and included primary research or description of practice-based educational initiatives undertaken at an educational institution were included. The nurse education focus was on adult nursing in the general civilian hospital setting. Editorials and literature reviews or discussion papers that did not include reference to a practice-based or educational initiative were excluded.

During our primary literature search we identified a sub-set of literature about the continuing professional education (CPE) of civilian nurses in the care of veterans in civilian hospitals. These papers focused on practice-based strategies for CPE of nurses. Anthony et al. (2012), conducted a search of commonly used psychiatric and medical-surgical textbooks and found an absence of any content in them about veteran health. In recognition of the relevance and importance of this literature in building the knowledge-base around the education of nurses about the care of veterans we decided to include what we have termed supplementary papers in our review. These supplementary papers therefore are CPE practice-based papers that focused on education of nurses about the care of veterans in civilian hospitals and were identified in the primary literature search.

2.2.2. Data Abstraction

Rigour in the literature search, data abstraction and data analysis and integration were ensured by undertaking searches collaboratively and establishing inter-rater agreement for paper exclusions and inclusions. Titles and abstracts from papers were scrutinised by two of the research team and provided an agreed initial database of papers for further review. Full-text papers were assessed for eligibility. The final number of papers included in the review was sixteen. This included ten papers focused on nurse education and six supplementary papers. The nurse education papers were focused on nursing programmes in the higher education setting. Eight of the papers were about undergraduate nursing programmes. Two papers (Butler et al., 2015; Linn et al., 2015) do not meet the inclusion criteria but are included in our discussion due to their being primary research and as they had important relevant information that can inform curriculum development of undergraduate educational innovations aimed at preparing nurses to work with veterans in civilian hospitals. The supplementary papers were on CPE in the clinical setting.

2.3. Quality Appraisal

The integrative literature review undertaken identifies, presents and synthesises published, peer-reviewed empirical and practise-based literature to understand how nursing programmes undertake the preparation of civilian nurses to care for the military veteran population in civilian hospitals. The type of studies identified and presented in the summary and discussion section indicate that the exactness of a systematic review

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