

Kansas Military Nursing Education Initiative

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Purpose

In 2017, an initiative was undertaken by Kansas nursing programs to develop a bridge program for military personnel with previous training as 68W (Army Combat Medic Specialist). The purpose of the military nursing education initiative was to accelerate and facilitate the time to degree of individuals who had completed the 68W training (or equivalent based on military branch). Individuals with this training in the Army, Air Force, Navy, and Coast Guard seeking either an associate or bachelor's degree in nursing were included in the initiative. Secondary goals included increasing applicant diversity, as well as improving access and affordability of nursing education for veterans. The initiative was a partnership with the Kansas Board of Regents, the Kansas State Board of Nursing (KSBN) and nursing programs across Kansas.

Planning and Development

The process for creating a statewide consortium of schools who could accommodate an accelerated or military nursing education program was thorough and inclusive. Selected nursing leaders rep-

resenting Practical Nursing (PN), Associate Degree Nursing (ADN), and Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) programs in Kansas traveled to the Military Education Training Center in San Antonio, Texas. Nurse leaders observed first-hand the didactic, laboratory, and simulation training required in the Army Combat Medic program. After this observation, faculty were selected from across the state to assist with the curriculum review process necessary for creating a military nursing articulation program.

The content outline for 68W was reviewed and compared with content from each of the nursing programs. A crosswalk was created and each program identified where credit may be awarded for prior learning. Missing from 68W training was content specific to nursing including select areas of physical assessment, nursing skills, and professionalism. For example, nursing process, end of life care, critical thinking, legal issues, and developmental care were not covered in the 68W curriculum.

Faculty noted that most military students had equivalent training in many of the concepts taught in the health assess-

ment course as well as content taught in the nursing fundamentals course. Faculty members collaborated to create educational modules that would cover content not taught in the 68W curriculum. Educational modules met the following criteria:

1. Were free of any philosophical or school-level variations in content.
2. Could be used in an online teaching format.
3. Content could be linked to meeting the NCLEX-PN/RN blueprint.

Implementation

Once the goal of creating content for a competency-based nursing bridge program for students with prior training as a Combat Medic Specialist (or equivalent) was met, nursing leaders began the process of exploring the feasibility of creating a bridge program within their educational institution. To facilitate adequate numbers for enrollment, leaders approved a consortium-style model for the bridge program. In this model, one nursing program would host the online course, but students enrolled in nursing programs across Kansas could enroll in the course through their home institution to minimize application fees at various institutions. Each program involved was guided to take the proposal back to their institution for internal approval and further collaboration. The intent was to implement a mobile program that could be used by several nursing programs simultaneously based on program growth and student need. Washburn University was identified as the school to initially support online delivery of the bridge course.

Washburn University School of Nursing requested a major curriculum change to KSBN that provided credit for prior learning for 10 credit hours (4-credit hours for Health Assessment and 6-credit hours for Nursing Fundamentals). A new 2-cred-

it-hour course, NU 302 Nursing for the Military Healthcare Personnel, included modules developed by the statewide workgroup. Medic students at Washburn University would not be required to take Health Assessment or Nursing Fundamentals but would instead take the new 2-credit hour course with the rest of the nursing curriculum. The content in the modules covered gaps identified in the crosswalk analysis mentioned prior. The requested change was approved by KSBN December 2019.

The first cohort (n=3) of students enrolled in NU 302 Spring 2020. All three students were enrolled full time at Washburn University. At the beginning of the semester students met with faculty in person to discuss the course and expectations for learning. After the initial meeting, the course was delivered in an online format. Students participated in discussion boards, completed written assignments, and took online exams. All students enrolled in NU 302 successfully completed

the course. End of semester course evaluations indicated high student satisfaction with course design and course experience (4.75 on a 5-point scale).

The second cohort (n=4) comprised of four students enrolled in NU 302 Fall 2023. All students successfully completed the course. Student feedback was consistently positive and included the following statements (shared with permission):

- "As a military member, it can be uncertain whether the time, effort, and dedication invested in service will be acknowledged in the civilian world. NU 302 offered a valuable opportunity to enhance our knowledge while building confidence in how our skills are recognized and valued within the university."
- "The course created a supportive environment where we connected with peers with similar experiences."
- "Being a 68W Combat Medic in the Army before joining nursing school, I was extremely nervous. On one hand I was confident in my abilities, but on

the other I was unsure how they would translate to nursing or if they would translate at all. NU 302 answered that question and left me feeling very confident in who I was, the friends I made, and my abilities going forward."

The goal moving forward is to promote the nursing bridge program for military medics by increasing awareness across Kansas. Nursing programs may review information provided by applicants to identify students that would qualify for this bridge program. It is the hope to continue and expand the program. Washburn School of Nursing offers this course each Fall and Spring if there are students who meet criteria. If you have questions regarding the Kansas Military Nursing Education Initiative program, please contact Dr. Debbie Isaacson at debbie.isaacson@washburn.edu. ■



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