B4.3: A Qualitative Study of the Role of Spirituality among Retired Military Nurses

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Abstract:
Introduction: The purpose of this study was to describe the role of spirituality across the lifespan in a sample of retired military nurses who had active duty assignments during World War II, Korean War, or Vietnam War. The research question was 'Did spirituality and religious beliefs serve as mechanisms that helped military nurses cope during the stress of war'. The significance of the study is that very little is known about the effect of spirituality and religion on nurse coping. Military nurses face tremendous stressors in providing care for soldiers wounded during a war.

Method(s): Purposive sampling was used to recruit nurses who had an active duty assignment overseas during World War II, Korean Conflict and Viet Nam. Researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 participants and these interviews were videotaped and transcribed. A team of researchers read the transcripts to identify the themes. A phenomenologic approach was used.

Results: Four themes emerged from the analysis - spirituality, caring, compartmentalization, and adaptability. The model of spirituality used in this study consisted of connectedness to self, the environment, others, and to a higher being. All nurses depended on the connectedness with each other to get them through stressful times. Their connection to a higher being was internal and they did not participate in formal religious practices. Caring included caring for country, nonjudgemental caring, and selfless caring (patient always came first). An interesting theme that emerged was one of compartmentalization - the ability to separate out emotions from the task that needed to be done so they could stay focused and get the job done. All nurses reported needing to be adaptable.

Discussion & Conclusions: Spirituality as defined in this study did play an important part in helping military nurses cope with the stressors of active duty during war. Many of the connections with peers have continued. Belief in God was important to all participants but religious rituals were not practiced during their military experience and any increase in rituals now may be related more to their increasing age than to their military experience. Additional themes were consistent for all participants.

Abstract History: This abstract has not been presented or accepted for presentation in whole or in part at the SNRS or other scientific meeting.
Financial Disclosure:
No, I (or a member of my immediate family) have not received something of value* from or own stock (or stock options) in a commercial company or institution related directly or indirectly to the subject of my presentation.

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