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SOCIAL WORK AND NURSING, FUNDED BY A **UB 3E FUND GRANT**, ARE JOINING FORCES IN THE **UB PARTNERSHIP FOR EXCELLENCE IN VETERAN CARE (UBPEVC)** TO BRING MORE COMPREHENSIVE CARE AND ACCESS TO SERVICES FOR VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES.



Associate Professor Lisa Butler

NO MAN/ WOMAN/CHILD LEFT BEHIND

Both University President Satish K. Tripathi's E Fund Grant, which finances collaborative projects that grow the university's community impact while enriching student education, and First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden's nationwide Joining Forces initiative, which aims to improve care for military service members, share the philosophy that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.



Improved care for military service members

Recognizing the need for a synergistic approach to the long-standing problem of gaps in care for veterans and their families, the School of Social Work (SSW) and the School of Nursing (SON) are uniting in the UB Partnership for Excellence in Veteran Care (UBPEVC) to analyze the current state of care, develop a comprehensive veteran care educational program for nursing and social work students, and improve training and service delivery for health care providers who serve veterans and military families.

One of the best ways to do that, according to the project's principal investigator, SSW Associate Professor Lisa Butler, is to develop a competency of military culture so that students and practitioners can more effectively relate to the veteran population. "Though we're not yet at the stage of analysis, we hope with our focus groups to gain more nuanced information to be able to highlight areas practitioners may not have considered emphasizing previously."

Training students now means a greater output of military culture-sensitive practitioners later. "Equipping graduate students with the knowledge and skills to work in a way that is reflective of the needs veterans are facing is one of our main goals. If the learning curve once they're in their professional careers is not as great, they can make a difference in the quality of services veterans and their families experience," observes Katie McClain-Meeder, UBPEVC project manager.

The development of this training is collaborative, and though there will be some overlap across the schools in terms of how the training is integrated, the specialization will be molded to fit the curricula and requirements of each program. The ultimate focus, though, is best practice in service delivery to veterans and their families, regardless of the particular military branch or conflict the individual served.

"Understanding on a more sophisticated level both military culture and individual experience — what veterans have faced and reactions and responses they may have having faced combat in addition to issues surrounding reintegration — is part of being trauma-informed when it comes to serving this population," observes Butler. "Recognizing the impact of those life experiences allows us to better understand and address underlying needs."

One of those too often veiled needs is service delivery to families of veterans. That's why project members aim to train students to identify and address the needs of veterans, but also with spouses, children and other family members in mind. "Anticipating the unthinkable is a powerful, painful state to live in," says Butler. "Coping with this and adapting to the possible mental and physical changes of a loved one is tremendously important."

The effects may be immediate or distant, faced by close and extended family. "If a health care professional can recognize this 'ripple' effect, they can better identify issues and intervene," advises Susan Bruce, School of Nursing clinical associate professor and the project's Co-PI. "It's more than just adapting — every family member must learn a different approach to their role and their place in the fold."

Politics aside, these individuals, whether veterans or their families, sacrifice tremendously and deserve complete, considerate, competent care. "The reality is," says McClain-Meeder, "that men and women are putting their lives on the line. This is a tremendous opportunity to be a part of a project that could serve the needs of this population in a much broader and more comprehensive way."

-SARAH GOLDTHRIFE