

## **UC San Diego**

### **Summer 2024 - UC San Diego Health Journal of Nursing: Forging a Path in Nursing**

#### **Title**

Nursing Military Pathways

#### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3hr7z51s>

#### **Journal**

UC San Diego Health Journal of Nursing, 17(1)

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#### **Publication Date**

2024-04-01

Peer reviewed

# Nursing Military Pathways

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My nursing pathway was intertwined with my decision to pursue a career in the military. The military was never my intended career path, however, my life's journey eventually led to completion of not only my bachelor's degree in nursing during my military career, but also earning a master's in nursing education. I have discovered profound joy in educating nursing students, and I attribute the trajectory of my career to the opportunities provided to me by my military background.

From an early age, I was placed into the role of a caregiver with the need to be mindful of the care given. While no one would wish this responsibility on a 13-year-old, the traumatic death of a parent made it necessary for me to assume the role of caregiver and to strive to provide some form of stability to my grieving parent. Immediately after this trauma occurred, my family uprooted everything familiar to us and immigrated to the United States from the Caribbean. Throughout my high school years, the focus was on maintaining my grades while alleviating some of the stressors on my mother, as she navigated her grief of losing her partner and adjusting to her life as a widow.

Joining the military was never a desire nor a thought on my career path as I navigated my journey towards adulthood and independence. As fate would have it, I was given the opportunity to take the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), a military test administered

to high school students. I merely completed the test simply for the option to skip class. The ASVAB is administered to assess if a specific individual has the qualifications to join the armed services and be assigned to an appropriate job. Based on the score achieved, recruiters from the various military branches will contact individuals with the intention of recruitment. Little did I know this test would change my future and propel me to become the individual I am today.

My service in the military did not start out as a nurse or an officer. The call from the recruiter(s) was not anticipated with enthusiasm from a newly graduated high school student in 2003. I was slated to start college to pursue my nursing degree without the need to worry about funding so there was minimal enticement to join the military service. What compelled me to pursue the military pathway was the simple desire to leave home. The Air Force seemed the most desirable out of all the military branches as I knew I could continue attending college with



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the goal of completing my nursing degree. The journey to nursing started slowly in 2004 as my initial focus was to learn and master my new military career path, medical administration. Although my job was not related to nursing, I was extremely thankful for this option as my initial lack of sufficient college credits would have directed me to accept a role as a military police officer. The support given to me by my supervisors and leadership team played a tremendous role in my continued desire to become a nurse.

Opportunity struck in 2008 when the Air Force launched a new commissioning program for nursing, the Nurse Enlisted Commissioning Program. This program gave enlisted active-duty members the ability to earn their bachelor's degree in nursing at any college or university with a Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) if they were selected. After completion of the degree and state boards, the military member would complete training to become a military officer and start their nursing career. As a first-time applicant to a new program, the fear and anxiety was overwhelming as there was not anyone that could properly mentor me for what to expect. Thankfully, I was accepted with my initial application. School, as many college students may express, was not easy, but the opportunity to complete my degree without the fear of accruing debt was motivation enough. With a grateful heart and determination, I achieved my goal in 2010 and completed my bachelor's in nursing and was commissioned to be an Air Force officer.

The Air Force provided two separate nursing career paths upon completion of my degree, labor and delivery or medical-surgical nursing. During nursing school, it became vividly apparent that I found joy in caring for newborns and maternal patients. As such, when the military career paths were offered to me, the only choice in my mind was labor and delivery. My military nursing career differed vastly from my enlistment as a non-officer. Training to become a labor and delivery nurse took me to many states, which included Texas and Arizona and various civilian facilities. This varying

approach to nursing taught me flexibility and different perspectives of care, civilian and military. The diverse military environment enabled me to care for a host of different cultures and views, while upholding professionalism and ensuring the utmost respect for others. Leadership opportunities for growth and expanded responsibilities came as my rank increased. My years as an enlisted member gave me a broader view to understand the mentality of the enlisted members under my supervision thereby strengthening my leadership abilities. During my service, I became a neonatal resuscitation instructor and childbirth instructor to ease my anxiety as a new nurse and care for newborns and the maternal patient population. These opportunities sparked a passion for teaching, and I was able to take advantage of the educational benefits provided by the military. After four years of being an officer, my pursuit of obtaining my master's degree in nursing education began. After serving six years as an officer, trauma once more reared its ugly head and put me on the path to ending my military service and

forging a new path as a civilian labor and delivery nurse in southern California.

Civilian nursing differed vastly from military nursing. After serving for a total of 12 years, the "military way" was difficult to modify, so a much-needed respite was taken after my discharge. As a form of adjustment to slowly delve into civilian nursing, I thought it beneficial to do a local travel nurse assignment. Not only did travel nursing give me the flexibility to adapt to civilian life without commitment to one facility, but it also granted the opportunity for rest mentally and physically in between contracts when needed. After completing my military service and gaining stability in the civilian sector as a labor and delivery nurse, I completed my master's degree in nursing education and currently teach aspiring nursing students maternal/newborn courses. Now seven years after completing my military service, my nursing journey has led me to UC San Diego Health, a facility where providing optimal care and continuous education is held in high regard.

*Untitled*, by Ten Mendoza, DNP, PMH-RNBC

