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# Nursing Students Behind Bars

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# Nursing Students Behind Bars

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## Caring for the Incarcerated

**2.2 million**

number of people incarcerated  
in the United States  
(Bureau of Justice, 2018)



More than **800,000** report having **ONE OR MORE** chronic medical conditions.

Approximately **500,000** had a previously diagnosed medical condition.

▲ *It is believed that the number of inmates with a psychiatric illness is even higher due to under-diagnosis (Wilper et al., 2009).*

Significant medical and mental health treatment is needed for inmates.

Many nurses will provide care for an incarcerated patient at some point in their career.

## Objectives

### TEACHING

Explore how this unique partnership is impacting our nursing students' development as practitioners as they acculturate to the nursing profession.

### PRACTICE

Develop nurses who engage in caring and non-judgmental practice, which will lead to optimized patient outcomes as well as personal and professional growth.

## Future Implications

This collaboration between the VCU School of Nursing and the VCUHS Secure Care Unit is helping to meet patient, student and clinical unit needs and is making a positive impact on the stakeholders involved. We plan to continue this partnership for the foreseeable future.

With only informal qualitative feedback, we recognize we lack formalized data related to this unique clinical experience.

In the future, we plan to develop a pre- and post-clinical experience likert survey measuring the students' confidence levels related to communication with patients, clinical care of patients, and overall opinion of the SCU, with a goal to move towards publication.

## A Novel Approach to Traditional Nursing Education

Undergraduate baccalaureate nursing students traditionally complete their introductory fundamental clinical rotation in low-acuity environments, such as medical-surgical units, rehabilitation units or nursing homes.

Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) School of Nursing and Virginia Commonwealth University Health System (VCUHS) have created a unique partnership in which brand new undergraduate baccalaureate nursing students are completing their first clinical rotation on VCUHS's Secure Care Unit (SCU).

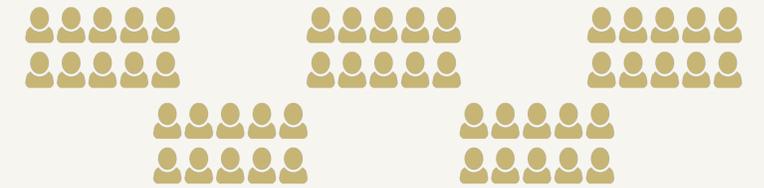


**77%**

Number of Virginia Department of Corrections (DOC) inmates who require inpatient or outpatient care that come to the SCU unless their acuity requires critical care (VCU & DOC, 2016).

The VCU School of Nursing has had a total of 50 beginner nursing students rotate through a semester long clinical on the SCU over the past three years.

Each clinical group is comprised of ten nursing students per semester.



Two methods were used to collect informal qualitative feedback from the student groups during an end-of-semester post-clinical conference.

**30 students**

were asked to describe any challenges or positive experiences they encountered while in the SCU.

**20 students**

were asked at the end of their rotation to write about how their fears, concerns and thoughts about completing their first clinical on the SCU changed from their first to last clinical day.

## Learner Perspectives

### POSITIVES

"I learned that people are just people and that I cannot judge where they are coming from."

"In having conversations with the patients on the SCU, I gained confidence in interacting with patients in any setting from any background."

"The patients themselves always encouraged me to ask questions, continue to gain new skills and never stop learning."

"The SCU patients repeatedly told us how much they enjoyed having us take care of them."

### CHALLENGES

"This clinical setting did not allow for interaction with patient's family and friends."

"The physical layout and extra layers of security on the unit made it challenging for me to obtain patient care items in the most efficient way possible."

"With only 16 beds on the unit, sometimes it felt a little cramped with a clinical group of 10 students."

