

Moving from Military Friendly to Military Ready

UW Health | Madison, Wisc

Workforce Development Case Study

Overview

UW Health is a large, integrated academic health system affiliated with the University of Wisconsin, headquartered in Madison with six hospitals and 90 primary and specialty outpatient locations serving over 800,000 patients annually. Like most hospitals and health systems, UW Health is experiencing significant challenges with recruiting and retaining their nursing workforce and looked to different populations to address their recruitment challenges. As a result, UW Health collaborated with several partners to move the organization from being “military friendly” to “military ready.”

Moving from Military Friendly to Military Ready

Being “military ready” within an organization means committing to ongoing structural and cultural change to effectively attract, support and retain military-connected talent. Becoming military ready begins with recognizing the value of the training and skills that the military medical personnel (MMP) bring. Many who join the military do so to serve a purpose beyond themselves, so when they transition to reserve status or civilian life, they often seek to maintain that sense of service, purpose and camaraderie. Unfortunately, many service members find that employers do not fully understand the value their military experience, especially regarding leadership training and dedication to mission. Once an organization acknowledges the unique strengths of military training, the next step is to actively support service members, fostering a sense of community. UW Health created a Service Corps, a group of active or retired service members, who meet monthly to share stories and challenges, re-creating the camaraderie they had in the military.

Beyond peer support, providing accommodations for ongoing service in the reserve corps can significantly enhance a sense of being valued. Assisting MMPs with scheduling around their two-week duty periods and drill weekends helps create an inclusive culture and builds loyalty to the organization. In addition, supporting MMPs who may need to deploy for extended periods demonstrates the organization’s appreciation for their service. At UW Health, this support extends to MMPs’ families, who are provided with health insurance, counseling, Employee Assistance Program benefits, daycare and other social resources to ensure their well-being.



Rudy Jackson as MC of the Heroes for Healthcare Salute to Service 4th Annual Gala: A Night to Be Honored

Developing a Military Ready Program through Partnerships

The move to military ready began with a coalition of health care organizations partnering with [Heroes](#)

[for Healthcare](#) to pass legislation making it easier for veterans to be hired into the health care workforce. Heroes for Healthcare administers a program for transitioning medically trained veterans to work in civilian health care, seamlessly transitioning service member to civilian life by ensuring that their skills, training and experience are translated, respected and accepted at educational institutions and health care facilities. Many military members struggle with the transition, as their training and experiences do not always translate to comparable civilian jobs in health care, which can lead to unemployment, underemployment or complete abandonment of the health care field.

In 2022, Wisconsin passed legislation allowing Army medics, Navy or Coast Guard corpsmen and Air Force aerospace medical technicians to provide

certain skilled health services without needing a license prior to commencing practice. This temporary licensure waiver enables the Department of Safety and Professional Services, in collaboration with the Department of Veterans Affairs, the medical examining board and the Wisconsin Board of Nursing, to establish a program allowing MMP to work in inpatient or outpatient facilities under the supervision of a physician or advanced practice provider.

To participate, qualifying MMPs must sign a memorandum of understanding that details their scope of practice and agree on a timeline for completing any licensure requirements, such as additional education or certification exams. UW Health offers tuition assistance, strong academic partnerships and a culture of learning to help ensure a smooth career development for these transitioning professionals.

Lessons Learned

While shortages drove some of this work, UW Health learned that this is as beneficial for the civilian staff members as it is for the military. This work was only made possible by bringing together team members and partners who either have military experience or work with those who do. The partnerships that UW Health formed with Concordia, a nearby college with some military enrollees, and Heroes for Healthcare, were a critical piece of becoming military ready. While talent acquisition partners of UW Health have previously supported MMPs, it was not a robust relationship that included other organizations.

Before this partnership, when UW Health hired MMPs, it was largely up to the unit director to help the team understand the value that military members would bring. Changing this perception is an essential first step toward becoming military ready, especially in states with fewer military personnel where MMPs

compete with applicants from traditional educational backgrounds. Recognizing that military members may have different training but possess valuable skills for both the health care team and their patients represents an important cultural shift.

For managers with no military background, UW Health recommends starting by asking questions about the MMPs' experience at the organization. One UW Health hiring manager reflected that a military interviewee was rigid and not innovative. When the organization discussed this with the interviewee,

he said that he likes to follow rules, policies and procedures. UW Health leadership members with military experience realized that the hiring manager misinterpreted his intent, and the manager gave consent to provide that feedback to the service member. The MMP was shocked by this feedback – his words to express respect for the organization were misinterpreted by the interviewer as rigidity.

One of the key lessons UW Health learned is that this effort should not focus just on recruitment, but on building a strong culture of military readiness. That process was more

complicated than anticipated, as culture change often takes time. However, once UW Health connected with partners and formalized their approach, the entire team recognized the value of supporting service members in their transition to civilian life, helping them grow both professionally and personally.



Kelly Wheeler, UW Health's 1st Military Medical Personnel to be hired, with her husband

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