

I began my career with Veterans Affairs Northern California Health Care System (VANCHCS) as a nursing student in our Veterans Affairs Learning Opportunities Residency (VALOR) program in June of 2012 in the Transitional Care Unit, Mather campus. This was a one year, 800-hour student externship. I was one of only three students selected for our VALOR program that year at Mather and felt honored to participate in the program. The 800-hours of hands on clinical practice was so valuable, above and beyond the regular nursing school requirements. I began in the summer between my 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> semester of my BSN program at California State University, Sacramento (CSUS). I returned to school that fall, after completing the first 400 hours, with more confidence and clinical skills and far ahead of my fellow nursing students in practice. I was paired with two preceptors, who are phenomenal nurses and still mentor me to this day.

Once I completed my BSN program, I was hired as a Registered Nurse in the Medical-Surgical Unit in October 2013. I was quickly up to full speed with a full patient assignment, thanks to the experience I already had on the units and within the system. My understanding and knowledge of Veteran centered care and the unique culture of our Veterans helped immensely as a new graduate.

In March 2015 I was able to return to the Transitional Care Unit where I had spent my VALOR days. This was very meaningful after obtaining some experience to return as a Registered Nurse. I worked on this unit Until April 2018 progressing in my practice. I became a charge nurse and held many leadership roles. I became our UBC chair for shared governance, facilitating monthly meetings and working to improve our unit through process improvement projects. I became a preceptor, precepting my own VALOR and other students. I worked with nurse educators as skills day champion, teaching a variety of skills. I was given many opportunities to develop my leadership skills, encouraged constantly to continue my professional development and return to advance my education.

In the fall of 2017, with encouragement and support, I returned to CSUS for my MSN. This was challenging to work full time and pursue advanced education, but I was able to complete my program in May 2020 graduating with a 4.0.

I now work as the Acute Care Nurse Educator for MSU and TCU, the same units where I began my nursing career. I am so grateful for the VALOR program and the support and encouragement of our leaders who allowed me the opportunity to pursue the career I have today. They continue to support my professional development through leadership opportunities.

Sincerely,

Montina Dudley-Alford, MSN, RN  
Acute Care Nurse Educator