Last August, our School of Nursing Center for Simulation Innovation (CSI) partnered with the South Texas Veterans Health Care System to provide training in a simulated environment to the VA’s newly hired Transition to Practice RN’s (TTPRN), some who are UT Health Science Center alumni. In March 2013, the VA selected three post-baccalaureate, newly graduated RNs, who have less than 12 months experience, into the RN Transition-to-Practice Program (RNTTPP).

This program is the result of the Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Nursing Services literature review which found that the quick transition from classroom to clinical practice can prove difficult for newly licensed nurses leading to turnover rates as high as 60 percent.

The one-year RN Transition-to-Practice Program (RNTTPP) is based on the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) curriculum. The educational strategies include: precepted clinical experiences, didactics in the form of monthly seminar days, clinical debriefings, simulation and an evidence-based practice project. The program affords the TTPRN the opportunity to perform the roles, duties, patient care activities and procedures that are carried out by RNs, and allows them to apply enhanced clinical competencies and honed skills to their particular patient population. The TTPRNs are also paired up with a mentor who provides nurturing and support while serving as a professional role model. This comprehensive curriculum eases the transition from entry-level, advance beginner Nurse to a competent professional Nurse.

The four major goals of the RNTTPP are to enhance clinical competencies; develop effective decision-making skills related to clinical judgment and performance; provide clinical leadership at the point of patient care; and strengthen the commitment to nursing as a professional career choice. RNTTPP incorporated TeamSTEPPS into the program. It is an evidence-based “Teamwork System”. TeamSTEPPS optimizes patient outcomes, and teaches nurses important skills such as leadership, mutual support and communication. TeamSTEPPS helps them understand the importance of teamwork and the impact of errors. It points out characteristics of high-performing teams and the role of the nurse within multidisciplinary teams when there is change in patient care.
Last August, the UT Health Science Center, School of Nursing hosted Seminar 5 of the program. The first cohort participated in four hours of TeamSTEPPS instruction and four hours of simulated Veteran Centered care. Vicky Dittmar, MSN, RN, CNE, CHPN and Wesley Richardson, PhD, RN, CNL, both Clinical Assistant Professors at the School of Nursing and VA employees, facilitated the full-day seminar. During the TeamSTEPPS portion, Vicky and Wesley shared experiences, perspectives and solutions with the TTPRNs. Building upon this classroom knowledge, the simulations provided scenarios that allowed the TTPRNs to respond to changes in patient conditions. In the simulations, four well-planned, veteran-centered scenarios were utilized.

VA nurses must be aware of the unique care needs of Veterans, including any special needs based on the era the veteran served in, as well as any combat related conditions or injuries that may negatively impact the veterans’ outcome. These special considerations of the veteran experiences are built into the simulated cases.

“The simulation was a positive experience for the RN resident,” says CSI Director Teri Boese, MSN, RN. “They were able to master important skills and strengthen their confidence by practicing nursing in a safe and supportive environment, with feedback and guidance from experienced nurses. We look forward to continuing this important partnership with the VA in the years to come.”

The UT Health Science Center San Antonio School of Nursing continues to be at the forefront of nursing education, embracing state-of-the-art clinical simulation as an effective means of improving the proficiency and performance of nursing providers while enhancing patient safety. Mrs. Dittmar and Dr. Richardson will continue teaming with the VA’s Transition-to-Practice Program to teach these didactic and clinical seminars twice per year, helping to produce the future nursing leaders who will make lives better for our nation’s veterans.