Thank you for the opportunity to share my story as one of many nursing stories this afternoon. Each one of us is truly a vibrant “piece of the puzzle” in this clinical excellence arena! I would like to share my experience as a clinical nurse in a patient care coordinator setting as a two-fold process: one on the personal level and the other in the big world experience of work.

Let me start out on the personal level . . . “once upon a time . . . just like many of the fairy tales of old, as it seemed so long ago. She started her journey before Christmas with the rescue sleigh . . . err, squad. Her journey to the hospital was due to the pain in her back. Her old nemesis, the “evil KD” (kidney stone) was back, in full vengeance to wreak havoc on her 75-year old body, again. Was this the beginning of the end?

After a week on the medical – surgical unit with flank pain and infection, the kidney stent was placed. Though something was still terribly wrong – confusion, agitation, and left arm weakness. Care coordination at its finest as nurses and doctors in various departments checking, and re-checking on tests and laboratory results. “She is in good hands,” I told myself after receiving the phone call that she was to be intubated and placed in the intensive care unit. Her Christmas gift -- a sub-acute right temporal cerebrovascular accident (CVA) with complicating factors that warranted her on another journey within the hospital setting . . . a bed on the intensive care unit (ICU).

These were the cold, dark days and nights of vigil that she, as well as the rest of the family, endured in her healing process. And there was a good outcome under the watchful care coordinators: nurses, doctors, social workers, and spiritual advisors who administered care and comfort to her as well as to her family, friends, and neighbors. The saying, “it takes a
“it takes a village to raise a child” is more aptly voiced in this setting … “it takes a village to heal a loved one.”

Though she is not here presently at this luncheon today, my mother has come through the clinical setting and rehabilitation with a quality of life that is the same, though very different, to what she may have been accustomed to. It is through the personal that she, and I, and the rest of our family received the Christmas gift of sickness and illness and journeyed through the process toward health and healing. For me, the “once upon a time” is today’s version of . . . “what’s happenin’ now!” I am proud of the progress that my mom has made in her stroke rehabilitation and the care coordination team(s) that empowered us to live, love, and learn from this health crisis. And there’s something about HOPE that’s so intoxicating, that keeps us all going . . .

In the big world experience of my work environment, I am a clinical nurse in a patient care coordinator setting at a healthcare company that works with military personnel: men, women, children and families . . . active duty and retired veterans. A clinical nurse in a behavioral health care setting and if any of you can relate to this in your work -- be patient, care coordinators!

“Oh, you’re one of THEM!” as I’ve tried to describe my work to other health care professionals. As a utilization management team member involved with one of the best health care companies in the world, I often get this response . . . “oh, you’re one of THEM” along with “how do you sleep at night?” I sleep very well, thank you very much! In my past experiences as a clinical nurse in hospital organizations, I have seen on one hand, the wonderful provider and patient relationships while on the other; patient care compromised due to fewer health care benefits. My role, as a patient care coordinator, is to assist and provide benefits in a kinder
and gentler way for behavioral health care authorizations for our military families. I work with families and extended families to include: men, women, children and adolescents, grandmothers and grandfathers, aunts and uncles, and same-sex couples with children and adolescents. My work extends to military families that reside here in Florida as well as families in 13 other states in the southern region of the United States. And not to mention to those families that reside in other regions of the world, while the military sponsor is on deployment. A big world in need of a kinder and gentler health care system!

“Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do.” – Goethe

This quote sums up what it means to me to take on this role as “patient care coordinator.” As a care coordinator, my personal and professional experiences revolve around providing care coordination with families, military treatment facilities, outpatient providers, inpatient providers, community services and resources. By locating behavioral health resources in various communities where families live, work, and breathe, I am of service.

In my experiences with patient care “on the floor” as it were, there are the times where a behavioral health care crisis occurs and as a team responder, I am designated to take the “crisis call.” In this instant, my former training as a police dispatcher and training as a behavioral health nurse “kicks in” in order to assist and serve this member. This caller is a military member, depressed and passively expressing a need to “end it all.” I am reminded of our humanity and to compassionately respond to this individual. With a calm, even, and steady demeanor, both she and I walk through the options . . . it’s about change and life worth living. “Can we phone a friend and have her stay with you right now?” “Is there a therapist that you have been working with? Let’s see if we can get you an appointment right now to see her.” “Are you on medications and did you take your medicine today?” The outcome of this crisis
call was favorable and this military service member agreed to see her current outpatient therapist within the hour, she texted a friend from work to come over and take her to her therapist’s appointment, and she voiced that she had not taken her morning medication.

Why, do you ask, would an individual call their insurance company in a crisis? A myriad of reasons, though perhaps the public understanding that there are clinicians working in these type of organizations, as well as any other health care organizations that employ health care professionals. I am a patient care coordinator, as well as many of us here today, in our own health care offices and treatment settings.

I recently presented a professional learning series discussion for the clinical staff in my organization for continuing education. This is one of the definitions on care coordination as described by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ, 2007):

“Care coordination is the deliberate organization of patient care activities between two or more participants (including the patient) involved in a patient’s care to facilitate the appropriate delivery of health care services. Organizing care involves the marshaling of personnel and other resources needed to carry out all required patient care activities, and is often managed by the exchange of information among participants responsible for different aspects of care.”

I am blessed and thankful to work as a nurse in this care coordination practice of health care organization. I work among the best professionals in the world to include: nurses, nurse practitioners, nurse executives, licensed master’s level therapists, psychologists, and psychiatrists. As my current nursing practice may appear as close to the business world as one could get without forfeiting that “clinical feel,” my experiences as a patient care coordinator reflect the care and comfort that I can provide to our diverse military service members and
families. I am humbled by the work that I, and my colleagues, offer to those who serve our country every day.

In conclusion of this clinical excellence presentation, my adage: be patient, care coordinator is a reminder for me to attend to my nursing practice(s) in whatever treatment setting I am planted in. Thank you for reading my story and I honor and respect each of you on your professional nursing journey.