

Medical Issues of Sexual Assault

**Satellite Conference and Live Webcast
Friday, June 24, 2016
12:00 – 1:00 p.m. Central Time**

**Produced by the Alabama Department of Public Health
Video Communications and Distance Learning Division**

Faculty

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Medical Advocacy

- **One of the first steps in providing care immediately following a sexual assault is to encourage the victim to seek medical attention at a facility designated by the community**
- **STAR is a free standing facility designated for the Montgomery, Autauga, Elmore, Butler, Lowndes and Crenshaw counties**

Medical Advocacy

- **Emergency room treatment is not always necessary**
- **An examination has two primary purposes:**
 1. **It provides immediate medical care by treating injuries, offering STD and pregnancy information and**

Medical Advocacy

2. **It serves as a means of collecting evidence**
- **Collection of evidence can only be done within 72 hours of the assault**

Tell The Victim

- **DO NOT bathe, shower, wash hands**
- **DO NOT brush teeth, gargle**
- **DO NOT eat or drink**
- **DO NOT use the bathroom**
- **DO NOT change clothes**
- **DO NOT touch or move any items that may have the assailant's DNA**

Reasons for Seeking Emergency Medical Care

- The survivor may:
 - Be in shock
 - Have internal and/or external injuries
 - Genital Bleeding
 - Pregnant
 - High consumption of drugs or alcohol
 - Uncontrollable behavior

What You Can Do:

- Help survivors identify medical needs
- Help them find the best place to meet those needs
- The survivor may be unaware of any injuries sustained in the assault or may not know where to go for medical assistance

What You Can Do:

- Medically stable patients of any age should be referred to a Rape Crisis Center that has specially trained professionals, ie. SANE
- Non-medically stable patients should be referred to any area emergency room
- The SANE on-call can assist with a phone assessment of the patients need for emergency care

Barriers to Examination

- One of the biggest barriers clients perceive in seeking medical attention is uncertainty about involving law enforcement
- The decision to prosecute can be made at a later time
- It is typically better for the victim to go ahead and consent to evidence collection before the evidence is lost

Scheduling the Examination

- If the client decides to have the examination, and or law enforcement request a Rape Kit, call the 24 hours/7days a week STAR Hotline at 334-213-1227
- The caller will be connected with the on call SANE or volunteer advocate

Scheduling the Examination

- Information needed to schedule an appointment: Name, age, date, time, location of assault, and any potential injuries

The Examination

- A Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) will perform the examination at STAR or a Mobile unit
- STAR is located at 530 South Lawrence Street inside the One Place Family Justice Center
- Any licensed medical personnel can collect an Evidence collection kits (Rape Kits) with the assistance of a nurse

The Examination

- SANE will set an appointment time to meet the victim at STAR
 - Do not send the victim to STAR without confirming an appointment time with the on call staff

The Examination

- Persons 14 years of age or older can consent to their own medical treatment
 - This means they can consent or refuse a sexual assault examination
- Victims can decline any part of the exam they are uncomfortable with

The Examination

- Medical personnel must follow very strict instructions when collecting evidence
- Once opened, the kit is not to leave their hands
- The examiner is responsible for the chain of custody at all times

The Examination

- Begin with a Sealed Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kit (Provided by State Of Alabama)
- All parties involved need to wear gloves to be careful not to contaminate evidence
- Use paper bags, NEVER plastic
- It is okay to use extra bags and extra sterile Q-tips as needed

Medical History

- A medical history will be taken
- The doctor or SANE will ask questions about the assault, health history, menstrual history and use of contraception
- In practice, we have found that taking the Survivors Narrative of Assault early in the history taking will assist in directing the examination

Medical History

- Questions about the assault can include time, place, date of attack, number of attackers, threats of violence or reprisal, restraints used, whether the victim douched, bathed, gargled, defecated, urinated, changed clothes, has used drugs or alcohol, experienced a loss of consciousness, if ejaculation occurred and its site, if a condom was used, if objects were inserted in to the vagina, etc.

Blood Samples

- Sometimes blood is collected as needed for date drug testing or during follow-up medical examinations

Genital Examination

- A vaginal speculum examination for signs of internal injury and collection of any physical evidence left by the rapist will be done
- Traces of semen may be detectable in the vagina and on the cervix for 72 hours

Genital Examination

- At the SANE Facility, a colposcope may also be used to detect and photograph injuries
- Anoscopes may be utilized to detect anal tears, bruising and semen

Physical Evidence

- Ideally the "rape kit" should be used to collect evidence
- This may include collection of pubic hairs, head hairs, foreign matter on the body (which could include samples of the rapist's hair, blood or skin), the clothes worn at the time of the assault, and pictures of documentation of any redness, swelling, scrapes, bumps, bruises or other evidence of external injury

Clothing

- If client is still wearing clothing that was worn during the time of assault the client may need to leave it as evidence
- In the majority of cases, the underwear will be collected and submitted in the evidence kit
- In very rare cases shoes are kept

Clothing

- If client has clothing evidence at home, recommend that they separate the clothing and place each item in a separate PAPER bag and call police to collect it
- Paper bags are used instead of plastic because paper bags allow the clothing items to dry completely

Clothing

- Remind police officers of the use of paper bags and proper collection of evidence

External Injuries

- A physical examination will be done to look for bruises, scratches, cuts and other external injuries
- The SANE or Police should take pictures of any visible injuries with the victim's consent

Pregnancy Concerns

- Victims will be given a pregnancy test
- Following a negative test result, the medical facility may prescribe a prophylaxis to prevent pregnancy following a sexual assault
- This emergency contraception is not to be confused with "the termination pill" or RU486

Pregnancy Concerns

- The prophylaxis is estrogen and progestin which when taken in appropriate dosage results in menstruation which prevents pregnancy from occurring in most instances
- It is recommended to take with food due to possible side effects of nausea or vomiting

Pregnancy Concerns

- Administration of medications to prevent nausea may be given prior to prophylaxis treatment

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STI's)

- The client may receive medications at the medical facility or a prescription for treatable diseases such as Chlamydia, gonorrhea, and trichomoniasis

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STI's)

- The current CDC approved medications are administered including an injection
- The client should receive information for follow-up testing and medications
 - This is very important

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STI's)

- The risk of acquiring HIV infection from a sexual assault is low
- The overall probability of HIV transmission from an HIV-infected person during a single act of intercourse depends on many factors

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STI's)

- These factors may include the type of sexual intercourse (i.e. oral, vaginal, or anal); presence of oral, vaginal, or anal trauma; site of exposure to ejaculate; viral load in ejaculate; and presence of a STI

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STI's)

- March 2015 update Rape Crisis Center Birmingham preparing to offer post assault testing and prophylaxis medication
 - Stay tuned for more development

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STI's)

- Remind the victim that they must have protected sex for the next six months to a year in order to protect their partners and of course themselves
- Stress follow up to private medical doctor or clinic for testing
 - Do not call SANE for results of test

Alcohol and Drug Facilitated Assaults

- There are a number of ways in which the use of alcohol or drugs may contribute to an act of sexual assault
- The substance most frequently involved in sexual assaults is alcohol, which the victim may consume voluntarily

Alcohol and Drug Facilitated Assaults

- In some cases the victim may not be aware of the level of alcohol content in drinks provided by the perpetrator

Alcohol and Drug Facilitated Assaults

- Increasingly, cases have been reported in which a variety of drugs are used by offenders to further impair the ability of the victim to prevent the assault

Alcohol and Drug Facilitated Assaults

- Rohypnol and GHB are the drugs most frequently referred to in this context but there are several dozen drugs that could be used for this purpose, many readily available in this country

Alcohol and Drug Facilitated Assaults

- The drug may be added to the victim's drink without her knowledge or administered in a variety of other ways
 - OTC Visine is being utilized

Alcohol and Drug Facilitated Assaults

- Clues to substance induced assaults may be if the client had been drinking alcohol and says their reactions were not in proportion to the amount of alcohol consumed or if they have no memory

Alcohol and Drug Facilitated Assaults

- The effects of these drugs can include drowsiness, impaired motor skills, dizziness, confusion, and amnesia

Alcohol and Drug Facilitated Assaults

- It is important to work from what the client remembers and prepare them for the possibility that they may not remember more

Alcohol and Drug Facilitated Assaults

- If medical personnel, law enforcement, or the victim have reason to suspect the use of a drug by the perpetrator, an advocate should discuss with the victim the ramifications of any type of drug testing
- No testing should occur without the victim's informed consent specifically agreeing to drug testing

Alcohol and Drug Facilitated Assaults

- There are two main issues for the victim in making the decision of whether or not to consent to a test for drug facilitated rape

Alcohol and Drug Facilitated Assaults

- First, the drugs can be very difficult to detect
 - Reasons for this include the speed with which the drug leaves the body and the fact that for multiple reasons a victim may not be tested within the ideal timeframe

Alcohol and Drug Facilitated Assaults

- Second, the victim may also be reluctant to consent to the test because of fears or concerns regarding the use of drugs unrelated to the sexual assault

Alcohol and Drug Facilitated Assaults

- Once detected by the crime lab this information could be used against the victim

Alcohol and Drug Facilitated Assaults

- Although the sexual contact is a crime regardless of whether or not the drug was consumed voluntarily, the victim may have legitimate fears related to this becoming public knowledge and other potential consequences of the detection of the illegal drug use

Alcohol and Drug Facilitated Assaults

- An additional concern for the victim who has voluntarily ingested illegal drugs is that engaging in felonious criminal activity may make the victim ineligible for compensation through the victims of crime compensation fund
- Ineligible for other support services if tested positive

Alcohol and Drug Facilitated Assaults

- Information provided to the victim should include:
 - Review of the types of drugs that will be detected by the test
 - Explanation of the factors that make drug detection difficult and clarification that a negative test result does not mean that a drug was not used

Alcohol and Drug Facilitated Assaults

- Discussion of the possible consequences of a negative result, both emotionally for the victim and regarding the status of the case
- Clarification that in a criminal case the results will be available to the defense and may become public knowledge, including results related to prescription drugs she may be taking...

Alcohol and Drug Facilitated Assaults

- ... for medical reasons and any illegal drugs she may have taken voluntarily, even if unrelated to the assault
 - This could also potentially lead to the release of other private information otherwise protected by rape shield laws, such as medical or mental health conditions

Alcohol and Drug Facilitated Assaults

- Opportunity for the victim to ask questions and discuss concerns related to the test
- Explanation regarding how she/he will be notified of the results of the test

Alcohol and Drug Facilitated Assaults

- The medical facility should contact law enforcement or the Department of Forensic Sciences to verify where to send the samples and in order to maintain the chain of custody
- Update December 2014 - DFS developing new kits with a test packet for collection of blood and urine specimens for drug testing

Tell The Victim

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