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Establishing a continuum of care to improve follow-up rates for survivors of sexual assault

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Introduction

In 2011 there were over 1,000 reported survivors of sexual assault in the state of Vermont. Of those survivors who presented to the Fletcher Allen Health Care (FAHC) Emergency Department (ED), 34 were over the age of 18, and currently recommended that all survivors be seen by a health care provider for follow-up medical and psychosocial care after undergoing a SANE exam. To address this, a follow-up phone call program has been implemented to improve follow-up rates.

Material and Methods

Review SANE data (Chittenden County)
- Received follow-up forms from SANE ED exam program
- Analyzed forms of adult (≥18 y/o) survivors
- See Figure-1

Define Problem
- Unmet needs of available health care resources following sexual assault.

Design Focused Interview
- Interviews designed to address issues of concern specific to Chittenden County.
- Constructed an interview assessing survivors’ transition from the ED to centers providing follow-up care.

Conduct Focused Interview and Collect Data
- Based on SANE follow-up forms, seven local organizations that provide care for survivors of sexual assault (survivors) were identified. A standardized and focused interview was administered to thirteen individuals from these sites.

Data Analysis
- Responses from the thirteen interviews were compiled and analyzed.
- Conclusions and recommendations were made based on literature review, analyzed data from SANE follow-up forms, and focused interview results.

Conclusions

- SANE programs are effective in providing consistent and comprehensive medical care, and improving psychological well being for survivors. The medical community highly values the work done by the SANE program.
- A published case report shows that follow-up appointments made before the survivor leaves the ED increase follow-up to ~80%. FAHC currently encourages the survivors to schedule their follow-up health care appointment and the SANE nurses make follow-up phone calls where possible.
- Interview data indicates that most local health care providers:
  - Are not satisfied with the current system of referral for survivors.
  - Consider a follow-up appointment after a SANE exam extremely important.
  - Believe it is extremely important for SANE nurses to make follow-up phone calls to survivors.
  - Would like more training regarding care for survivors of sexual assault.
- In Chittenden county, there is currently no system to track the number of survivors who receive the recommended two week follow-up.

Recommendations

- Encourage local organizations to increase public outreach, knowledge, and resources for survivors.
- Encourage greater visibility of resources available for survivors, i.e. websites and printed materials.
- Strengthen collaboration between local organizations serving survivors of sexual assault.
- Consider allocation of additional resources to SANE nurses in order to improve communication with survivors after the SANE exam and promote greater rates of follow-up care.
- Consider changes allowing SANE nurses to assist survivors in scheduling follow-up appointments before discharge from the ED.
- Provide education for health care providers and support staff regarding trauma informed care and local resources available for survivors.

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References


The biggest thing is making the transition from the emergency setting to the office setting as seamless as possible. Break down the barriers to accessing care. If we can do that it would be a big victory.” – Dr. Tom Lishnak, Milton Family Practice