



# TRAINING BULLETIN

Volume LIII, Issue 2, April 2024

Dominic H. Choi, Chief of Police

## PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION OF SEXUAL ASSAULT CRIMES – PART II MEDICAL/FORENSIC EXAMINATIONS

### INTRODUCTION

An important aspect of a sexual assault crime investigation is the medical/forensic examination. There are three purposes for medical treatment following a sexual assault:

- To examine and treat the victim for physical injuries;
- To conduct a sexual assault evidentiary examination; and,
- To evaluate for pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and offer treatment options to the victim.

The purpose of this Training Bulletin is to present guidelines for obtaining medical treatment and evidence collection services for sexual assault victims.

### Sexual Assault Evidentiary Examinations

Evidentiary examinations should be conducted for **all types** of sexual abuse and sexual assault cases (e.g., rape, forced oral copulation, digital penetration, and some types of sexual battery). Forensic evidence from the victim's body shall be collected within 120 hours of a sexual assault.

In certain cases, evidentiary examinations could be conducted after 120 hours. The circumstances in which a sexual assault evidentiary examination should be considered after 120 hours include cases in which the victim still has visible injuries (including genital trauma), cases in which the victim complains about pain or bleeding (especially vaginal or rectal), and cases involving non-sexually active individuals (including children, teenagers, and the elderly). Children and teenagers often do not disclose the full extent of the sexual abuse they have suffered in initial interviews, particularly in cases involving ongoing abuse over an extended time period. If more than 120 hours have passed since the assault, contact the appropriate detective for advice.

When emergency medical attention or a sexual assault evidentiary examination are not indicated, sexual assault victims should be encouraged to get medical care from a regular provider, including testing for STDs and pregnancy related to a sexual assault.

## **Victim Management**

Officers should explain to the victim that the importance of a medical examination is to ensure the victim's wellbeing and to collect evidence. Evidence may include photographs of injuries and the collection and preservation of biological specimens. The hospital may also need to collect the victim's clothing worn during or immediately after the assault. Officers should encourage the victim to bring a change of clothing or have someone bring clothing to the hospital for them.

If a victim is **reluctant** to have a medical examination, officers should explain the benefits and importance of collecting and preserving evidence now. Even if the victim does not wish to proceed in a criminal investigation presently, they may wish to proceed in the future. A post sexual assault medical examination can ensure the victim's wellbeing and collect evidence that may be irretrievably lost as time passes. Victims should be informed that they can give consent only to those procedures with which they are comfortable. Victims have the option to consent to an examination and not release the evidence kit to law enforcement for forensic analysis. **Refusal** by a victim of medical treatment must be documented in the appropriate report (e.g., Investigative Report, Injury Report).

Officers should advise the victim to delay any personal hygiene activity (e.g., bathing, douching, urinating, brushing teeth) that may alter, contaminate, or destroy valuable evidence such as semen, saliva, hairs, or blood. If the victim was forced to perform an act of oral copulation on the suspect, encourage the victim not to drink, eat, or chew gum as this may destroy evidence.

## **Sexual Assault Response Team (SART)**

Whenever possible, officers shall ensure that sexual assault medical examinations are conducted at a designated Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) medical center (see attachment). The SART medical personnel have the specialized training, experience, and equipment necessary to properly conduct sexual assault medical examinations. They also possess an expertise in documentation, collection and preservation of evidence, and experience in presenting medical findings during court proceedings.

Officers shall offer transportation for a victim to one of the SART hospitals whenever a sexual assault medical examination is required. Officers should telephonically notify the appropriate SART hospital that a person is being transported to that facility for the examination. This is especially important during non-business hours when on-call forensic medical personnel may have to respond from home to conduct the examination.

After obtaining expressed consent, the only exception to taking a sexual assault victim to a SART hospital is when the victim has suffered a serious physical injury requiring immediate medical care. In cases where the victim is transported to a non-SART hospital due to a medical condition, the responding officers should contact their Area

Detectives for advice and ensure experienced forensic medical personnel conduct the examination for evidence collection.

### **Drug-Facilitated Sexual Assaults**

Drug-facilitated sexual assaults can present challenges for investigators. The effects of the drugs used to incapacitate victims may also interfere with a victim's ability to remember what happened. For example, in cases involving suspected ingestion of substances such as Rohypnol and Gamma Hydroxy Butyrate (GHB), victims may report being in a club or at a party and waking up hours later. Sometimes they wake up in a different location, with their clothing off, or with their clothing in disarray. Victims who suspect they may have been drugged and sexually assaulted should be taken for sexual assault examinations, even though they do not remember any specific sexual acts.

These drugs evacuate very quickly from the body. It is imperative that a urine sample be collected from the victim as soon as possible. If the victim has to urinate prior to getting to a medical facility, the officer should provide the victim with a standard urine sample jar. If necessary, a clean container such as a disposable drinking cup or plastic bag may be used. The urine sample should be given to the medical examiner who conducts the evidentiary examination to be labeled and packaged with the Sexual Assault Evidence Kit. It is common practice for medical facilities administering post-sexual assault examinations to collect two urine samples (at different times) that can assist in the analysis of the victim's blood to determine alcohol levels at the time of the assault. Crime scene evidence is important in these cases. Recover any containers from which the victim may have consumed beverages.

There may be times when a victim may have been drugged and sexually assaulted, but there is insufficient evidence at the time of the preliminary investigation to establish a crime had occurred. In this situation it is important to document the circumstances of the incident in the narrative of the Property Report and book the Sexual Assault Evidence Kit and urine sample.

### **Medical Treatment for Juveniles**

Generally, parental consent is needed for the medical treatment of a juvenile. However, when a medical examination is indicated for a sexual assault victim who is a juvenile, medical treatment may be administered without parental consent. If the juvenile is 12 years of age or older and alleges to have been sexually assaulted, they may consent to medical care related to the diagnosis or treatment of the condition and the collection of medical evidence related to the assault.

Parental consent for an evidentiary examination of a juvenile is not required for cases of known or suspected child abuse. If questions arise, contact Juvenile Division or Detective Support Division for advice.

## **Evidentiary Examinations for Suspects**

Evidence found on the suspect's body may link the suspect to the victim, the crime scene, or other items of evidence. Suspect evidentiary examinations are conducted at SART medical facilities by trained medical staff for biological evidence, trace evidence, or physical injuries related to the assault. Given the varied circumstances of sexual assault arrests, officers should contact the appropriate detective for advice prior to transporting a suspect for an evidentiary examination.

Advise the hospital in advance if you are transporting a suspect in custody for an evidentiary examination. If the facility does not have separate areas for conducting victim and suspect examinations, take precautions to ensure that there is no cross-contamination of evidence and that the victim and suspect do not encounter one another. Whenever possible, take the suspect and the victim to separate medical facilities.

Evidence collected during a suspect examination will be documented on the Forensic Medical Report: Sexual Assault Suspect Examination (Office of Criminal Justice Planning - OCJP Form 950) and given to officers at the conclusion of the examination.

## **Sexual Assault Evidence Kit**

A Sexual Assault Evidence Kit (SAEK) is used by medical personnel to collect and package dried secretions, vaginal swabs, rectal swabs, oral swabs, pubic combings, and any other evidence collected from the victim or the suspect as part of the medical examination. The items are packaged separately by medical personnel in white laboratory envelopes and are placed in an "Analyzed Evidence -To Be Frozen" envelope and given to the officer. Keep the victim and suspect SAEK and clothing separated.

SAEKs have a bar code and unique identifying sexual assault evidence (SAE) number. The unique SAE number will correspond to a SAEK booked to a specific victim of an alleged sexual assault crime and uploaded to the Sexual Assault Forensic Evidence Tracking (SAFE-T) Database. The SAFE-T Database is maintained by the Department of Justice (DOJ).

## **CONCLUSION**

Sexual assault crime investigations are complex and the importance of medical/forensic examinations for victims should not be underestimated. Following proper procedures will assist in the successful prosecution of suspects and enable the victim to begin the recovery process sooner.

**This Bulletin cancels and supersedes Volume XXXIX, Issue 5, Preliminary Investigation of Sexual Assault Crimes – Part II Medical/Forensic Examinations, May 2007**

Field Training Services Unit  
Police Training and Education

DISTRIBUTION "A"

Attachment: Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) and Rape Crisis Centers

## Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) and Rape Crisis Centers

Below is a list of SART Centers that provide medical/forensic exams and Rape Crisis Centers that provide counseling services and other resources by geographic Area. Unless exigent circumstances exist, officers shall transport victims to the SART Center nearest the victim's residence.

LAPD Areas	SART Center	Rape Crisis Center
Devonshire, Foothill, Mission, North Hollywood, Topanga, Van Nuys, West Valley	<b>Dignity Health Northridge Hospital Center for Assault Treatment Services (CATS)</b> 14651 Oxnard Street, Van Nuys, CA 91411 (818) 908-8632	<b>Strength United</b> (818) 886-0453
Hollywood, Olympic, Pacific, Wilshire, West Los Angeles	<b>Santa Monica UCLA Medical Center Rape Treatment Center (RTC)</b> 1250 16 <sup>th</sup> Street, Santa Monica, CA 90404 (424) 259-7208	<b>Santa Monica UCLA Medical Center RTC</b> (424) 259-7208
Harbor, Southeast	<b>Long Beach SART Center</b> 1720 Termino Avenue, San Pedro, CA 90804 (562) 497-0147	<b>YWCA Greater Los Angeles</b> (877) 943-5778
77 <sup>th</sup> , Harbor, Southeast, Southwest	<b>Providence Little Company of Mary Medical Center – San Pedro</b> 1300 West 7 <sup>th</sup> Street, San Pedro, CA 90732 (562) 497-0147	<b>YWCA Greater Los Angeles</b> (877) 943-5778
	<b>Providence Little Company of Mary-Torrance Center</b> 4201 Torrance Boulevard, Ste 250 Torrance, CA 90502 (562) 497-0147	
77 <sup>th</sup> , Central, Hollenbeck, Hollywood, Newton, Northeast, Rampart, Southwest	<b>LA County USC Medical Center Violence Intervention Program (VIP)</b> 2010 Zonal Avenue, Building B, Room 3P61 Los Angeles, CA 90033 (323) 409-5086	<b>Peace Over Violence</b> (213) 252-5299
Central, Newton, Northeast, Rampart	<b>San Gabriel Valley Medical Center</b> 438 W. Las Tunas Drive, San Gabriel, CA 91776 (877) 209-3049	
Hollenbeck	<b>LA County USC Medical Center VIP</b> 2010 Zonal Avenue, Building B, Room 3P61 Los Angeles, CA 90033 (323) 409-5086	<b>East Los Angeles Women's Center</b> (800) 585-6231
	<b>San Gabriel Valley Medical Center</b> 438 W. Las Tunas Drive, San Gabriel, CA 91776 (877) 209-3049	
<b>*For Asian and Pacific Islander Language Assistance</b> 77 <sup>th</sup> , Central, Hollenbeck, Hollywood, Newton, Northeast, Rampart, Southwest	<b>LA County USC Medical Center VIP</b> 2010 Zonal Avenue, Building B, Room 3P61 Los Angeles, CA 90033 (323) 409-5086	<b>Center for Pacific and Asian Families</b> (800) 339-3940
	<b>San Gabriel Valley Medical Center</b> 438 W. Las Tunas Drive, San Gabriel, CA 91776 (877) 209-3049	

Prepared by Detective Bureau

February 2022