

**Rape Crisis Counselors Can Benefit You:** Why it's Helpful to Have a  
Rape Crisis Center (RCC) Counselor at the Hospital During a Sexual Assault Exam

Massachusetts Department of Public Health ~ Sexual Assault Prevention & Survivor Services  
250 Washington Street, 4<sup>th</sup> floor; Boston, MA 02108-4619 ~ Phone: 617-624-5457 ~ TTY: 617-624-5992

*All Rape Crisis Center **Hotlines** are available **24/7**, every day of the year.*

- The Rape Crisis Center (RCC) counselor may arrive at the hospital before the Emergency Department (E.D.) is ready for the exam. The counselor can keep the survivor and/or significant others accompanied while waiting for the E.D. nurse/doctor or the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE).
- The RCC counselor is completely and solely focused on the survivor, not the collection of medical evidence. At appropriate points in the exam, if the client requests something such as a drink of water, the RCC counselor can leave the exam room to obtain what is needed. This keeps the clinician free to stay in the exam room to maintain the chain of evidence.
- The RCC counselor can have eye contact and conversation with the survivor throughout the process - while the clinician will often need to look away to complete the elements of the exam.
- The RCC counselor can often help the client get through the exam by helping her/him to re-focus....helping the survivor to "keep surviving" as s/he goes through the exam.
- Working in partnership with the E.D. clinician/SANE, the RCC counselor serves as a second check point to make sure that the survivor is truly consenting to all parts of the exam.
- The RCC counselor will be able to assist and advocate for the client to connect with "after care" - such as counseling services, getting test results, Victim Compensation, victim rights, etc. And RCC counselors will be there on an on-going basis to continue to provide such assistance. The RCC counselor is able to answer questions and provide supported referrals to local resources - such as mental health services, counseling groups and legal services. A "supported referral" means helping and following up with clients to assure they have connected with the services they need....rather than just handing the client a list of phone numbers.
- The support of an RCC counselor - together with the skills of the E.D. clinician or SANE - may result in 1) collection of more evidence, 2) decreased victim withdrawal from the criminal justice system and 3) increased likelihood of investigation and prosecution of the sexual assault case. If the case goes to trial, an RCC counselor can accompany the survivor to court. This attention to helping survivors heal, feel hope and feel confident may affect their rate of participation in legal prosecution: *"When survivors are not as traumatized, they are more willing and capable of participating in the prosecution process."* \*\*
- Both at the hospital and in the long term, the RCC can support the survivor's (non-offending) family members and significant others. If the survivor prefers, the RCC counselor can stay with the family/significant others during the exam, rather than in the exam room with the survivor.
- **RCC hotline services are available 24/7/365** for survivors and their significant others. The hotlines are there to help the moment a survivor wakes up from a nightmare. The hotlines will be there for the survivor who has flashbacks many years in the future. The hotlines are also there for E.D. clinicians who work in sexual assault trauma care and need to talk about their experience in a safe, confidential environment. Calls to the hotline can be anonymous.

*Hospitals and Rape Crisis Counselors Together:* Working collaboratively, we can help the patient (survivor) to feel safer and supported, help improve the quality of the survivor's hospital experience, and provide faces of human dignity after a very inhumane event in the survivor's life.

\*\*Campbell, R. Bybee, D. Ford, K. Patterson, D. *Systems Change Analysis of SANE Programs: Identifying the Mediating Mechanism of Criminal Justice Impact: Project Summary.* April 2008. US Dept of Justice grant final report.