

HUMAN TRAFFICKING MEDICAL RED FLAGS



ROLE OF THE MEDICAL PROFESSION

- Studies indicate that between 28-50% of human trafficking victims encounter medical professionals during the time they are trafficked.
- Most of those individuals are not identified as victims, let alone offered potential rescue or services.
- Be aware that the problem exists, be looking for it, and add it to the list of things for which you already screen.
- Have a plan for what you will do if you find it.
 - Report: Human trafficking of children under the age of 18 is considered a severe form of child abuse, and medical professionals are mandatory reporters.

ROLE OF THE MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL

- Trust your gut. If something doesn't feel right, then find a way to obtain more information.
- Develop rapport and trust. Health care professionals have a unique opportunity because of their role in the system.
- Question potential victim away from their trafficker – “Hospital policy requires me to talk to each person individually.”
- Obtain translators unrelated to the people the victim came with.
- Do not promise more than you can provide.
- Have patient talk to the National Hotline at 1 (888) 3737-888

VICTIM ISSUES

- Victims typically do not self-identify as victims
- Abused previously and system failed to help them
- At odds with law enforcement because runaway or criminal conduct
- Feelings of shame, worthlessness, and rejection by society or system
- Fearful of consequences to themselves or family from trafficker
- Fearful of consequences from family or community due to cultural or religious norms

- Cognitive distortion: believe this is “life choice,” they deserve the abuse, or have no power to change it
- Believe that this is the fastest and easiest way to earn money
- Habituated to sexualization of self
- Maladaptive coping mechanisms: addiction, lies, adrenaline, street life
- See their trafficker elevated while victims diminished

RED FLAGS IN A MEDICAL SETTING

- Patient presents inappropriately dressed for age, weather, circumstances
- Patient or accompanying adult lies about the patient's age
- Accompanying person does all the talking and refuses to allow the patient to answer questions
- Patient appears submissive, passive, little eye contact
- Accompanying person does not want the patient to be left alone with health care professionals
- Patient is depressed, frightened, and/or anxious
- History does not make sense or correlate with injuries
- While able to answer initial questions, patient or accompanying person is not able to answer follow-ups or describe where they live, go to school, work, etc.
- General signs of abuse/neglect present
- Patient or accompanying person presents a questionable identity claiming to be in a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship, visiting cousin, a family friend, exchange student, or uncle
- Lack of knowledge about alleged “family” relationship
- Child has a knowledge of sexual terminology or a number of sexual partners that is not age appropriate
- Distrust of law enforcement or anything that appears related to “the system”
- Patient may be openly hostile or terrified, refuse to answer questions, give attitude
- Payment in cash rather than insurance
- Minimizing health concerns or other risk factors
- Inability to speak English or claim that the patient cannot speak English and accompanying adult must translate

- History of hospital hopping
- Vague medical history
- Presents for care but then leaves prior to receiving care
- Refuses to follow instructions for follow-up care
- History of failing to return for follow-up appointments
- Person or group brings multiple people in for care for similar conditions. Ex. Same person brings multiple pregnant teens in for prenatal care, claiming they cannot speak English

MEDICAL SPECIFIC RED FLAGS

- Bald patches where hair pulled out
- Lacerations or bruises
- Scars
- Ligature marks
- Burns (cigarette or otherwise)
- Bite marks
- Partial dentures where teeth were forcibly knocked out or in
- Stab marks
- Malnutrition, dehydration, exhaustion, stunted growth
- Dizziness, headaches, memory loss from traumatic brain injury
- Untreated disease
- Dental/visual problems
- Chronic back pain
- Muscle strains
- Cardiovascular and respiratory issues related to exposure to chemicals or toxins
- Serious industrial injury
- Overuse injuries
- Reinjury due to failure to rest and rehabilitation
- Persistent or untreated STIs or UTIs
- Vaginal or rectal trauma

- Multiple pregnancies, repeated abortions, or miscarriages
- Infertility
- Abnormal discharge or odors
- Pelvic Inflammatory Disorder
- Cotton fibers or sponge pieces in the vaginal vault
- Previous SANE exams
- Multiple sexual partners
- Jaw and neck problems from repeatedly giving oral sex
- Back problems or red marks/blisters on feet from high heels

MENTAL HEALTH RED FLAGS

- Trauma bonding
- Depression, hopelessness
- Anxiety
- Panic attacks
- Suicidal ideation
- Addiction – forced or used as maladaptive coping mechanism
- PTSD
- Affective, behavioral and cognitive problems – Many teen victims diagnosed as bipolar, oppositional defiance disorder, personality disorder not otherwise specified
- Low self-esteem
- Dissociation

POTENTIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR CHILD VICTIMS

- Use indirect questions that spark conversation. Victims often do not self-identify, nor do they recognize themselves as “trafficked people.”
- What grade are you in, where do you go to school, favorite subject, etc.
- Relationship to the person that brought them – ask some questions that require more knowledge than just a title: boyfriend, uncle, aunt, brother, friend
- Have you been physically hurt by someone else?

- Have you ever been pressured to do something that you don't want to do?
- Can you come and go as you please?
- Have you been threatened if you try to leave?
- Have you ever run away from home?
- How often do you see or talk to your family and friends?
- Have you ever had to trade sex for money, food, a place to stay?
- Have you had more than five sexual partners?
- Do you have enough to eat and drink?
- Where do you sleep? On a bed, a cot, the floor?
- Is anyone forcing you to do anything that you do not want to do?
- Did someone tell you what to say today?

YOUR RESPONSE

- Receive the information without judgment or negative reaction regardless of the language with which it is delivered.
- Focus on the victim's safety.
 - "Our first priority is your safety."
 - "We are here to help you."
- We want to make sure that what happened to you does not happen to anyone else.
- We can help get you to a safe place.
- We can help meet your needs for food, shelter, and medical care.

Please Note: The Red Flags are to be viewed within an individual's context and circumstances. For instance, someone who is an airline pilot may have multiple hotel keys due to the fact that she travels for a living, while if you saw those same hotel keys on a 16-year-old child, it could raise potential concerns. No one Red Flag means that an individual is being trafficked. If you are viewing multiple Red Flags, it is a cause for concern and a reason to start asking questions and trying to obtain more information, if you can do so without putting yourself or the person you are concerned about in danger. In the end, if you believe that someone is being trafficked and is in immediate danger, call 911 and provide descriptions of cars, people, locations, etc. to law enforcement or if you need to remain anonymous, you can call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1 (888) 3737-888.