



# SANE adventures

By Stephanie Carlson

As part of my being proactive in obtaining all the extra knowledge I can get for Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) work, I arranged to spend time at the STD clinic downtown. Yesterday was the second of two afternoons and I found each one helpful. The nurses went beyond my expectations in explaining how their clinic works, how they follow up with patients, and in permitting me (with client permission) to observe a couple of exams. Time well spent! Yesterday, I watched one exam, observed a couple of client interviews, and followed the nurses with their preparation of slides and specimens for the lab.

After their last client had left and I asked my final few questions of staff, slipped my coat on over my khakis and polo shirt “uniform”, tucked my lanyard and name tag into my coat, left the nurse area and went out into the reception area.

I looked at the bulletin board one last time to see if there was anything of value for emergency when a basket with a sign and the word “free” caught my eye. Anything free is automatically worth exploring, right? Realizing what the brightly coloured wrappers contained, I briefly considered picking up a few. I hate to pass up any freebies because no matter how unlikely it may seem at the time, the opportunity may come up to use them one day.

The more I thought about grabbing a handful on the way out, the less valuable they seemed. Given my age (not telling) and marital status (41st anniversary last winter) it seemed highly unlikely that I would have a personal use for them. Is

this something we could pass out to company in our home? Um... no, I don't think so. Any aesthetic value for home or office? No, not really. As for using them at work... well, it would be insensitive to give out condoms to victims of sexual assault.

I left the clinic through their very well-marked door (this is important to the story) and pulled the door behind me. I looked up and found myself facing the husband of an old friend, who eyed me and then the door, me and the door again.

We had socialized with the couple a while ago but haven't seen either of them since my stay-at-home/Birkenstock-wearing/grind-your-own-wheat and make-your-own-bread/home schooling days when our kids were young (maybe 15 or 20 years ago). He wouldn't have known that I am working as a nurse again, if he even knew that I was ever a nurse. So here I am, exiting the STD clinic through their clearly marked door, wearing street clothes, trying to look inconspicuous.


It's amazing the thoughts that can run through your head in a brief moment. Will he recognize me after all this time? Did he see the sign on the door? Does he know what STD means? Should I say anything or just hold my head up high and act like a social visit to the STD clinic is something that women of my age routinely enjoy in our leisure? Should I say something about the tragic risk of picking up disease from public toilets? Should I fabricate a warning about an unpublicized epidemic of airborne syphilis?

He smiles broadly and greets me. Rats! He knows me. He probably knows what

STDs are and has already formulated a plan for telling our entire shared network of old friends and no telling who else, that I was there. Is it significant that he doesn't extend his arm to shake hands?

In an instant I forgot to play it cool and act casual, forgot about public toilets and airborne syphilis (would that be sniffle-ous?), forgot that he might not know what an STD is. I lamely mumbled that I was there for work, which couldn't have appeared more improbable, especially since I stammered a bit and probably blushed. He was emerging from the travel clinic after getting his shots for a missionary trip to India. Swell.

Possibly my declaration that I was there for work is more believable than the other potential conclusion. When you see a grey-haired, middle-aged, matronly woman leaving an STD clinic, what are you supposed to think? Oh right! Don't tell me—I already know that HIV is running rampant in some seniors' complexes.

All I can say is this: I'm glad that I resisted the fleeting temptation to pick up a handful of give-away condoms. Bad enough to be seen departing from the clinic, without a handful of supplies in my hand! I learned a good lesson today. Sometimes passing up a bargain is a good thing. Condoms wouldn't have gone with our decor anyway, no matter how I might creatively have used them. 

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