

# NENA Position Statement: Care of the sexual assault patient in the emergency department

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Past Revision Dates: N/A

Next Revision Date: November 2011


## Issue

- Statistics Canada estimates that one in four Canadians will be sexually assaulted in his or her lifetime.
- Expected sequelae to sexual violence may include infection and pregnancy, post-traumatic stress disorder, somatic complaints, significantly increased substance use and substance abuse, increased utilization of health care resources, impaired social interaction, and loss of productivity in the workplace, depression and suicide.
- Sensitive and timely immediate treatment and appropriate referral for follow-up physical and emotional care can improve the long-term outlook for this vulnerable patient population.
- Many emergency registered nurses have acquired specialized education as Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE). A SANE is a registered nurse with special education in the comprehensive care of sexual assault survivors, the recognition and documentation of injury, the collection of evidence, and may qualify as an expert witness in a court of law. SANE education includes crisis intervention; acute care and treatment; injury recognition and documentation; evidence detection and collection; sexually transmitted infection and pregnancy prophylaxis; appropriate

referrals for subsequent care of the survivor of sexual violence.

## NENA Position

- Emergency care of the sexual assault survivor should include safety, timeliness, privacy, sensitivity, and competence.
- Sexual assault survivors may expect to receive comprehensive care of physical and emotional needs.
- Sexual assault survivors may expect to receive care from health care practitioners who are prepared by education and temperament to provide competent examination and treatment in the emergency department.
- Sexual assault survivors may expect to receive appropriate documentation, collection and preservation of evidence, and submission to policing agencies in accordance with current standards of forensic care.
- Emergency health care providers should receive preparation to equip them to provide appropriate care, forensic services, and referral services to adult and pediatric survivors of sexual violence and their families.
- Sexual assault survivors should not be denied the support of a person of trust or a representative of advocacy services, if desired.
- It is highly desirable that emergency departments employ SANE to provide comprehensive care to sexual assault survivors.

- Emergency registered nurses should collaborate to promote community awareness of sexual assault and should support community sexual assault prevention initiatives. 

## References

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