

# Role of the FNE

Maeve Pond

SAFE/SART Policy Advocate



# *What is a SAFE?*

- A Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE) is a procedure that provides survivors with important medical care and allows for the collection and preservation of potential evidence
- Conducted by a trained Forensic Nurse Examiner (FNE)
- Must be completed 15 days after the assault



**EVIDENCE**

# Options for Survivors

- Survivors have options when choosing to report a sexual assault; the three main avenues for reporting are:
  - Emergency Department
  - Law Enforcement
  - Rape Crisis Center/Advocate
- Survivors reporting to the Emergency Department may choose not to receive the SAFE and simply receive medical treatment
  - If they choose not to receive a SAFE, advocate presence should still be offered
- CPS/APS is called in cases that involve child sexual abuse or cases that involve vulnerable adults



# Advocacy

- Advocates are available to survivors and can be present during any portion of the Sexual Assault Forensic Exam – **including in the exam room**
  - *It is important to be aware of what to do if you are in the exam room (i.e. do not speak for the survivor, do not touch nursing tools, etc.)*
- The SAFE Hospital should have a protocol in place in which an advocate is immediately notified when a survivor presents to the emergency department
- **Important note:** *A survivor may choose to have an advocate at the hospital even if they choose not to have a SAFE completed*



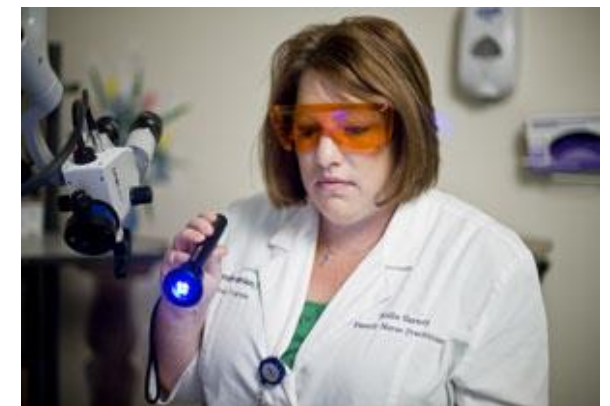
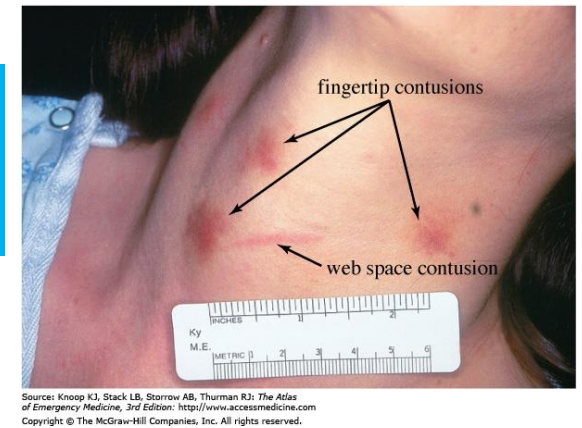
# What Occurs During a SAFE?

- Exam Includes:
  - Detailed interview by FNE
  - A body exam
  - Evidence collection
  - Photographs
  - Documentation of Findings
- **Important note:** A survivor can choose not to receive any portion of the exam at any time
- During the interview, survivors can disclose what they choose to about the assault. However, an advocate can gently encourage details as it will impact medical prescriptions and evidence collection
- An exam can last anywhere between 3-6 hours



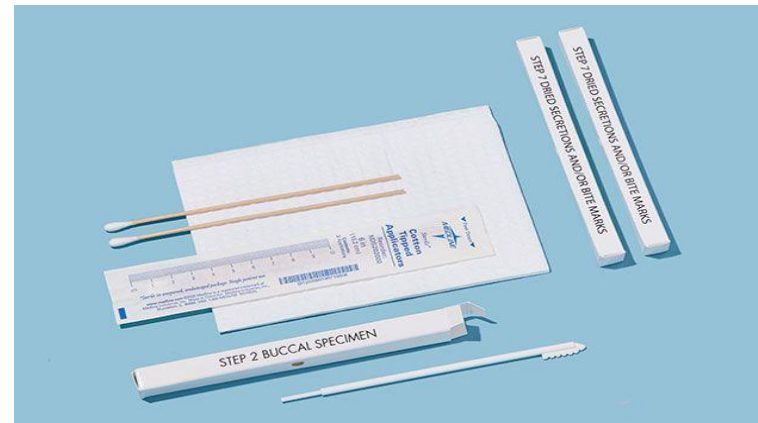
# External Body Exam

- During the exam, the FNE will look for bruising, wounds, and other injuries that may have occurred during the assault
- If any injuries are present, the FNE will then photograph and document the wounded areas
- In cases where injuries might not be visible (i.e. strangulation cases), an Alternate Light Source (ALS) may be used to photograph these areas



# Swabbing

- A Forensic Nurse will use cotton swabs to collect evidence from various parts of the body, including the skin, inside the mouth, and under fingernails
- A genital and anal exam are also completed in which a forensic nurse conducts both internal and external swabs of the area



# *Post-Exam*

- Sexual Assault Forensic Exams are **FREE**
- The FNE or Advocate present will inform the survivor about community resources available to them, including counseling, support groups, etc.
- The Survivor will also be offered emergency contraceptives, STI prophylaxis, and HIV prophylaxis **free of cost**



# *Evidence Preservation*

- There are several things a survivor can do to best preserve evidence before getting a SAFE:
  - Not changing clothes is important because the survivor's clothes will be collected into evidence during the SAFE. If the survivor does change clothes, they should bring the clothes with them to the hospital
  - Refraining from using the bathroom
  - Refraining from eating, drinking, or brushing teeth
  - Not showering or bathing beforehand
- If a survivor has done any or all of the previously listed activities, do not discourage them from getting a SAFE. The FNE will still attempt to collect evidence.

# *Importance of Advocacy During a SAFE*

- Short video

# Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault & Sexual Assault Legal Institute

## MCASA

(301) 328-7023

## SALI

(301) 565-2277

## Website

[mcasa.org](http://mcasa.org)

*CONTACT INFO*