

# Enhancing Health Equity: The Role of Sexual Assault Care and Forensic Exams in Patient Advocacy, Justice, and Wellbeing

Katherine Watkins, Gabrielle Sisselberger, Sydney Wessner, Allison Denman  
Drexel University X Philadelphia Sexual Assault Response Center (PSARC)



## Abstract

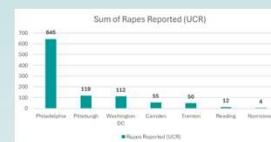
- Sexual assault care is an essential aspect of holistic patient wellbeing, providing not only immediate medical intervention but also long-term physical, emotional, and legal support. Forensic exams offer survivors an alternative route to justice, helping to restore a sense of control and validation while addressing their broader healthcare needs.
- Forensic exams are integral to gathering evidence that supports legal proceedings, offering survivors an opportunity to seek justice while also attending to their holistic health needs.
- This poster highlights the need to integrate sexual assault care literacy regarding nursing students, empowering student nurses to advocate for comprehensive, patient-centered care. Nurses, as first points of contact, are in a unique position to support survivors' health and their pursuit of justice, ensuring that patients' wellbeing is addressed on multiple levels.
- Moreover, this work calls for policy reform to mandate insurance coverage for forensic exams, ensuring that all survivors, regardless of financial status, have access to these services.

## Methodology

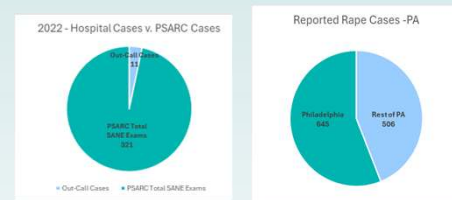
- This project is informed by a consultation with Allison Denman MS, BSN, RN, SANE-A, a Clinical Director and Forensic Nurse Manager at the Philadelphia Sexual Assault Response Center. Who provided data, education, statistics, and key insights on the role of forensic exams in sexual assault care, overall patient well-being, alternate routes of justice and healthy equity.
- The research and data was received from PSARC (ethical and HIPAA compliant) that included statistical data comparing reported sexual violence in Philadelphia compared to other cities in the country. Demographic data of PSARC patients and how they are affected by violence. A Sexual Assault Testing and Evidence Collection Act (SATEC) fact sheet that details the state's responsibility of overseeing the evidence collection of testing Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) cases codified into law, including hospital compliance for reporting to law enforcement when evidence is collected. Along with the emergency SAVES regulations for Pennsylvania Department of Health's standards of care and evidence collection for patient's seeking SANE services in the hospitals
- With the data provided, we were able to analyze the accessibility to forensic exams (focused in Philadelphia), gaps and gap fixes regarding health care, along with cost analysis for these services.
- The insights gained from the expert's data revealed the relationship between politics and patient care when forensic exams are involved. Calling attention to the necessity for literacy among young nursing students, understanding that forensic exams are a tool for patient care and an alternate route of justice. The data collected supports the call for policy changes to ensure health equity for individuals receiving this care, whether that be through private insurance coverage or federally provided coverage.
- This methodology ensure that the recommendations presented are evidence-based and ground in both real-world data and expert guidance, constructing a compelling case for the inclusion of forensic exam literacy in nursing and policy reforms to support holistic patient care.

## Results

- In 2021, 645 rapes were reported in the city of Philadelphia and 1151 TOTAL rapes were reported in Pennsylvania. Making Philadelphia home to 56.03% of Pennsylvania's rapes reported.



- In 2022, 321 SANE exams were completed at PSARC with 11 out-call cases from other Philadelphia and Greater Philadelphia area hospitals.



- In 2009 the city stopped providing the little funding they were giving out to hospitals (at the time it was temple Episcopal and Jefferson Health) and those hospitals stopped providing those services as soon as the funds were pulled. They've now capped the granted funds to \$1000 per patient that an entity may see so the patient won't be billed, nor could their insurance be billed either.
- SATEC and Pennsylvania's emergency SAVE regulations set the minimum standards for care, but compliance varies. As seen in the chart provided there were 11 call-outs in 2022 from largely known hospital entities that failed to meet these standards. Violating both state and federal regulations such as

EMTALA.	
Out-Call Cases Attended	
Hospitals	Out-Call Cases Attended in 2022
Jefferson	2
Presbyterian	1
Temple University Hospital	6
HUP	0
Einstein	1
Veteran's Hospital	0
Nazareth	1
Total	11

- Evidence revealed inconsistencies in care depending on the facility that a patient is brought to. Disparities are exacerbated by the lack of universal coverage for forensic exams leading to inequitable access based on location and types of insurance. Out of pocket expenses on average would be no less than \$1000. If a patient needs HIV nPEP the out-of-pocket expense would be closer to \$4000. Neither of which include ongoing services costs. Hepatitis and HIV lab panels alone are \$5000 for one analysis, these must be repeated several times. PSARC coverage is vital for sexual assault survivors.

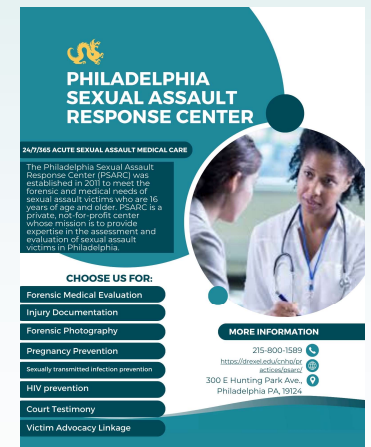
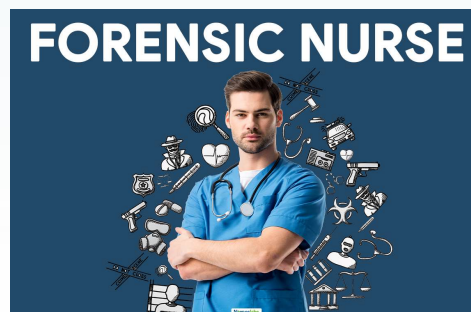
## Conclusion

- In summary, it is of the utmost importance to call for further attention to the causes the Philadelphia Sexual Assault Response Center (PSARC) is advocating for as well as the care that they provide. By creating a deeper understanding with increased health literacy amongst nursing students in Pennsylvania, this creates a foundation to further support this program across the state.
- We strongly urge nursing students to educate themselves on the care that SANE nurses provide, while additionally recognizing the importance of these specialized treatment services as they should be the standard in any health care setting, especially emergency response. As nursing students nearing the workforce, we are at the forefront of change.
- By pushing the importance of the work accomplished through PSARC to our state policy representatives, we can enact the changes necessary to strengthen our statewide response to those who are sexually assaulted. Survivors of such a traumatic event are immensely deserving holistic and well-informed care.
- By providing this education to students and health care providers, we can bridge these disparities in care and better advocate for our patients in such a delicate situation.



## Introduction

- This poster focuses on the importance of sexual assault care and how it significantly impacts a patient's holistic wellbeing, including but not limited to, physical, emotional, and legal support.
- As forensic exams are vital to comprehensive care for healing physically and mentally for survivors, serving as an alternate route to justice. Despite the importance of these exams, access to them is often limited due to financial barriers and disparities in care.
- There is a strong need to improve literacy among student nurses, or the next generation of nurses, so that there is a greater understanding of how forensic exams are a tool for both patient care and justice. Not to mention, the need for policy reform to occur to promote health equity and ensure these exams are covered for all individuals in need of these exams.
- The project was informed by expert consultation with Allison Denman MS, BSN, RN, SANE-A, Clinical Director and Forensic Nurse Manager at the Philadelphia Sexual Assault Response Center (PSARC), providing data, education, and key insights into the relationship between forensic exams, patient care, and health equity.



## Acknowledgements

- Authors, Katherine Watkins, Gabrielle Sisselberger, and Sydney Wessner, extend a profound thank you to Allison Denman MS, BSN, RN, SANE-A, Clinical Director, Forensic Nurse Manager at the Philadelphia Sexual Assault Response Center (PSARC), as well as former SNAP president, for providing a comprehensive education on all that PSARC does and how SANE nursing greatly enhances positive patient outcomes.