Medical Treatment and Collecting Forensic Evidence after Sexual Assault

Sexual assault is a crime. It can happen to anyone and is never the fault of the victim.

The experience and impact of sexual assault is different for everyone but whatever the reaction, it is a normal response to an extreme emotional and physical violation.

Medical help after sexual assault may be needed for injury treatment and shock, in relation to screening for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and pregnancy, and for collection of forensic evidence to support a report to Police.

If the person is considering or is planning to report the crime they have experienced to Police, forensic evidence is an important part of the evidence Police will gather. Try not to tidy or wash or change anything on or about the person until after forensic evidence has been collected. If the person needs to wash before going to the hospital, taking the clothes they were wearing when the assault took place may provide useful forensic information, as will any injuries.

Major hospitals in NSW have specially trained staff and provide 24 hour medical and forensic services and counselling. The NSW Rape Crisis Centre has a list of services, and can assist with arranging transport.

The Sexual Assault Counsellor will provide information about the person’s rights and options, and assist with management of the immediate impact of the violence. Decisions about medical treatment and screening, and the collection of forensic evidence, are made solely by the person who has experienced sexual assault. At all times the person has the right to ask questions and expect proper and informed responses. If a female or male medical or forensic examiner is preferred, ask. If someone is available the Sexual Assault Unit will make arrangements.

In NSW a person who has experienced sexual assault can have ‘just in case’ forensic evidence collected. They can then decide later about making a statement to Police and signing the evidence over for examination.

Sexual Assault Units in hospitals have showers and they can assist in arranging for a support person to bring toiletries and clothes. Alternatively the Sexual Assault Unit will have clothes and toiletries if required.

If permission for forensic evidence collection has been given, the forensic examiner will ask where the assault took place and what occurred. The examiner can then look for relevant evidence and injuries. If bruises or other sore spots appear up to a week after the assault, this information can be provided to the medical examiner for inclusion in the report.

Where pregnancy may have occurred during the assault, the hospital can provide the morning after pill or it can be purchased from most chemists. It is effective up to 72 hours after the assault. If the 72 hours has passed, the hospital or NSW Rape Crisis Centre counsellors can assist with pregnancy options counselling. Most STI’s don’t show up in tests for at least three days. HIV/AIDS can take up to three months to be identified. The infection rate of HIV/AIDS from sexual assault is low, but testing to make sure is important.

If someone has experienced sexual assault and they are concerned about STIs, they can contact the FPA Health line on 1300 658 886, from 8.30am to 5pm Monday to Friday.