

Grant Update

A Summary of Grant Activity

Governor's Crime Commission

NC Criminal Justice Analysis Center

The Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence Forensic Nurse Program for Western North Carolina

Domestic violence is an ongoing concern in North Carolina. While many agencies provide support and services to victims of domestic violence, the grant awarded to Mission Healthcare in Asheville sought to add an additional facet to their program by providing forensic documentation to assist victims with the legal aspects of their cases.

The Problem

Documentation of domestic and intimate partner violence underscores the need for forensic nurses. According to information provided by Mission Healthcare:

- 37 percent of all patients who seek care in hospital emergency rooms for violence-related injuries are injured by a current or former spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend
 - Less than three percent of victims visiting emergency rooms disclose or are asked about domestic violence by a nurse or physician
- 71 percent of those seeking domestic violence services in North Carolina are from rural areas
 - Over 16 percent are from western North Carolina counties

The need is also substantiated by Helpmate, a non-profit agency which provides a domestic violence crisis line and shelter in Buncombe County. They received 1,374 calls for assistance between July 1, 2004 and June 30, 2005.

The Grant

Mission Healthcare Foundation partnered with the N.C. Governor's Crime Commission to fund a Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence (D/IPV) Forensic Nurse at Mission Hospitals in western North Carolina. The program, based on the successful Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) model Mission began in 2005, trained SANE certified nurses in forensic nursing. It enabled nurses to provide clinical and forensic assessments for victims, including evidence collection, comprehensive case documentation, assistance in securing compensation, and referrals to support agencies. Once trained, nurses would teach staff in other area hospitals, law enforcement agencies and support



Mission Memorial Hospital in Asheville, home of the Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence Forensic Nurse Program for Western North Carolina. (Photo courtesy of Mission Memorial Hospitals.)

Grant Update: The Domestic/IPV Forensic Nurse Program for Western North Carolina



*Emergency Department
Entrance at Mission
Memorial Hospital in
Asheville (Photo courtesy
of Mission Memorial
Hospitals.)*

services in the area. The project began in July 2006 when Renee Collette, a SANE certified nurse, was hired as project director.

Goals and Objectives

Forensic nurses are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week and serve as the initial contact for victims of domestic violence. They provide clinical and forensic assessments, comprehensive case documentation, including a time line of abuse and subsequent interventions and actions taken, and referrals to other agencies for assistance when necessary. The nurses obtain documentation to support applications for assistance and work in collaboration with Helpmate, to ensure that the victim's immediate requirements are met. They coordinate with Mission's business office to assist lower income victims with their most urgent needs while they wait for federal reimbursement. Volunteers, trained in domestic violence issues, operate crisis lines, provide emotional support, assist victims in navigating legal procedures and secure necessary community resources. The nurses also provide regional education and training and support replication of the program at other area hospitals to increase community awareness of domestic violence forensic services.

Community Involvement

Collaboration with direct service agencies, such as Helpmate and local law enforcement agencies, as well as with the judicial system ensures a comprehensive approach and increases the effectiveness of the actions taken and the safety of the victims served. The list of community resources available to the program includes Helpmate, Pisgah Legal Services, Legal Aide Organization, Inc., area district attorney's offices, the Buncombe County Task Force on Family Violence, the Madison County Task Force on Family Violence, and domestic violence agencies in the surrounding counties.

Program Evaluation

The program has been evaluated on an ongoing basis. Victims receiving assistance from the nurses are surveyed on their knowledge both before and after receiving assistance from the forensic nurses. They have indicated how they utilized community resources and their perceived level of safety at three month intervals, compared to their initial assessment of available resources upon entering the program. Additional survey results were examined one year after implementation to determine if any changes were needed in forensic procedures or case documentation. Information gained from the evaluations was used to refine and improve procedures and services offered to victims.

In the first months of the grant cycle, between July and December 2006, the D/IPV forensic nurse received 45 referrals within the hospital setting. Between January 2007 and December 2007, the number of referrals increased to 278 patients. Policies were revised to include a specific standard of care for victims of domestic/intimate partner violence and practices were put in place to

*“... having a
specialized nurse
examiner equipped to
deal with a battered
woman in crisis in the
local emergency room
is a Godsend.”*

*— Deborah Vingle,
Helpmate, Inc.*

Grant Update: The Domestic/IPV Forensic Nurse Program for Western North Carolina

document the time line of incidents. Subsequent actions and interventions were implemented and documented to support legal cases. To ensure the comfort, privacy, and safety of victims, a private exam room was designated for the use of the program.

Helpmate, Inc. Program Director Deborah Vingle, a licensed clinical social worker states:

“ . . . their medical staff knows how to respond in the emergency room, assuring clients of safety and sensitivity when dealing with an assessment, possible examination, and follow-up. The program has also been a wonderful additional resource for education and prevention in the Asheville-Buncombe area and in the western North Carolina Region.”

Accomplishments

This year the forensic nurses trained through the Western Carolina program participated in national training seminars on domestic and intimate partner violence, forensic interviewing and assessment. They have also provided training in 17 area hospitals to 745 health care professionals and social workers in the western North Carolina region. Additional training was provided to Emergency Room staff, Helpmate and emergency medical service personnel. Forensic nurses have visited each program in 22 counties, as well as the police and sheriff’s departments in those counties and have worked to establish links in each of the counties to provide support to victims of domestic violence.

Nurses have participated in several task forces and groups, including the Asheville-Buncombe County Family Violence Task Force, Western North Carolina Crime Victim Coalition, and the Western North Carolina Five-County Domestic Violence Task Force. Several of the nurses have been used as expert witnesses in domestic violence cases that have gone to trial and three have received awards for their services in the community.

Summary

The Domestic/Intimate Partner Forensic Nurse grant is the first comprehensive program in the western North Carolina region to support victims of domestic/intimate partner violence in a hospital setting, to educate healthcare providers and to bring together community organizations to provide assistance to victims. A presentation has been scheduled with senior administrative leaders at Mission Hospitals to request that the program be continued to assure that forensic nurses are available at all times to assist victims.

The D/IPV forensic nurses provided training in 17 area hospitals to 745 health care professionals, including nurses, certified nurse aides, licensed practical nurses and social workers in the western North Carolina region.

“This program has to continue in order to make the health care community continue to be a part of the solution.”

*— Renee Collette,
Project Director*

The Domestic/IPV Forensic Nurse Program for Western North Carolina

GRANT SUMMARY

Grant:	Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence Forensic Nurse for Western North Carolina
Area Served:	Buncombe County and Western North Carolina (22 counties total)
Implementing Agency:	Mission Healthcare Foundation
Project Director:	Renee Collette, RN
Funding:	Total: \$107,200 Federal Funds: \$80,400
Overview:	This project supports a Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence Forensic Nurse, who has been previously certified as a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE), at Mission Hospitals to provide clinical and forensic assessments, comprehensive case documentation, assistance in securing victim compensation, and referrals to other support agencies.
Original Grant Objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 20 SANE RNs undergo training in Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence and forensic procedures• A minimum of 150 healthcare providers in the region receive education on the signs of D/IPV, assessment, documentation and community resources• At least 250 women seeking treatment for injuries at Mission Hospitals acknowledge D/IPV and seek assistance• Regional collaborators/partners indicate a 75% improvement in case documentation as a result of the D/ IPV program• At least 75% of the victims accessing the D/IPV program services utilize community resources and be aware of ways to deal with safety issues in their particular situation
Accomplishments:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 22 SANE RNs have been trained as of January 2008. Beginning in June 2007, D/IPV nurses were on call to the Emergency Departments at Mission Hospitals 24/7.• 745 health care providers at seventeen hospitals have been educated through January 2008• 348 patients have sought assistance through the program• Information on available services and resources was provided to 100% of the individuals referred to the D/IPV Forensic Nurse• In every case that went to court, documentation was given to the attorneys and a forensic nurse was available to testify when necessary• Patients requesting assistance through the program utilized community resources in 75% of the cases; 100% were made aware of safety plans and means to help them deal with their particular situation• Documentation by health care providers in hospital settings increased from 5% to 45%• Agencies, including domestic violence support agencies, law enforcement and district attorney's offices in 22 counties have been informed about the program and available resources