

The crucial role of a SANE nurse: It's more than medical

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Sexual assault survivors come into contact with many people along their recovery journey, perhaps none more important than a "SANE" nurse.

Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners are specially trained to collect forensic evidence during an examination. They also take patient histories, assess trauma injuries and provide the emotional support needed during an evaluation.

"Somebody who is trained can be more sensitive to the trauma symptoms, to emotional stress, can be a little more understanding,

maybe asking certain questions that aren't triggering or leading," Sam Houston State Psychologist Michelle Castanon said.

The careful examination and collection of evidence can go a long way toward winning a conviction in court. Successful convictions can also help other victims who may fear speaking up to report a crime.

SANE nurses increase the potential of a successful prosecution by ensuring that the integrity of samples gathered during examinations are maintained in order for that evidence to be admissible in court. SANE nurses even provide testimony in some cases, based on what they observed during their time with a sexual assault survivor

and the evidence they collected.

SANE nurses are registered nurses who receive a special certification to either work with adults and adolescents or with children. Their training focuses on comprehensive care.

"I run the sexual assault survivor group, and I've heard so many stories where they've come forth and said people have handled the situation very insensitively," Castanon said. "That training in trauma is needed, and SANE nurses provide an environment where survivors will feel comfortable and want the help SANE nurses can provide them with."

Survivors must consent to an examination, but carry no other responsibility.

"SANE nurses are permitted to collect evidence at no charge to the victim," university police officer Joe Thornton said. "They are specifically trained to collect samples for evidentiary purposes."

A more compassionate and professional response to survivors may help them find the strength they need to follow through with reporting the crime.

The vast majority of rapists are never brought to justice. It's estimated that 95 percent of U.S. college campus rapes go unreported. What's more, reports show perpetrators of sexual crimes are about 35 percent more likely to re-offend.

SHSU does not employ a SANE nurse, but UPD does work closely with Huntsville Memorial

Hospital which does have a SANE program. The university does have a certified SANE nurse on its faculty.

SHSU Clinical Assistant Professor Charmin White does not serve as a nurse on campus, but still feels her expertise can make a difference.

"I feel the most I can offer survivors of sexual violence through my years of service is the desire to support them on their paths to hope, healing and justice," White said. "I will always be standing by for that telephone call, as long as it takes, I will be waiting."

The pen is mightier than the sword: Journalists' role



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Journalists are bestowed with great power when given the

task of reporting a news story. But as Spiderman has taught us, "With great power comes great responsibility."

The pen is indeed mightier than the sword, and the pen has the ability to write a script that can forever change the course of a person's life. This is why, when provided with the choice of printing the names of rape and sexual assault victims, journalists generally agree to put the pen away.

As an unspoken rule, most but not all media organizations provide complete anonymity for

victims, arguing that they are protecting the abused from further victimization. Advocates agree that names should be withheld, as victims may be subjected to intense public scrutiny and blame that often follow being named in the media.

There is a minority that argue rape is news. By treating this crime differently than any other, it reinforces the idea that rape shouldn't be reported at all, even to law enforcement.

Sometimes, victims release their names on their own.

In 2013, a 16-year-old rape

victim (who will hereby remain nameless) created quite the stir when she went public with her story and her identity. She first took her story to the Kansas City Star, and soon after her name was everywhere. Newsrooms across the country threw their anonymity policies out the window with the justification that she had "gone public first."

While many news organizations followed the victim's lead in going public, stricter rules apply when dealing with minors.

Most news organizations will never print the names of minors

who come forward with allegations of sexual abuse whether or not they have gone public themselves.

The issue is far from resolved, and the work of citizen journalists who don't adhere to any publication policy muddy it even further.

The pen has the power to bring fiery light to dark places, but that light must be kept under the vigilant control of an honest hand, lest it burn brighter and wilder than anyone ever intended.

My neverending nightmare: I was sexually assaulted

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Have you ever had a nightmare you were stuck in? You dream about the danger all night-long, screaming, crying. You try to wake up and escape, but when daylight finally comes you realize the nightmare will never end because it's now your reality.

You never speak of the nightmares out loud, because that would mean something was wrong. You creep along the halls of your high school praying not to be seen. With each passing minute your anxiety grows, fearful of when it might happen again. But you try to act as if nothing is wrong.

But something is terribly wrong. You have been stripped of any control you ever had, and you

are damaged. Yet to the world, you present a picture perfect image: a straight "A" student, captain of the dance team and class president with a great boyfriend. But on the inside, the reality was much darker.

I was sexually assaulted my sophomore year of high school by my teacher.

What's going through your head your now? I just told you my deepest darkest secret, something I couldn't even reveal to my parents for two years because an overwhelming feeling of shame consumed me.

Telling my boyfriend of two years was difficult. He broke up with me because I "let" this happen.

I was rejected for only speaking my truth. I can still hear the whispers. I can feel the dirty looks of the other students, all eyes on me as I walked along the very

halls that betrayed me.

Why did the words hurt so much? Why couldn't they see the student who was motivated, dedicated and driven to her studies? The star pupil lost her luster. Instead I was asked why or how I could "let" someone do that to me.

Why did I let him do that?

The answer is simple: I didn't.

Let me be crystal clear: victims don't display a big welcome mat at their feet that says, "Take advantage of me."

I didn't want to be scared out of my mind for the rest of my life, worried about when the next attack could occur.

I didn't ask to be afraid of anyone who resembled him. I didn't desire to constantly have a revolving door of negative self-views plaguing me on a daily basis. These are just some of the side effects of the emotional trauma,

the invisible contusions left on the heart and soul of a sexual assault victim.

Not to mention the relationships lost, both romantic and platonic.

Was I asking for this? Did I deserve to have this happen to me? Hell no!

I was assaulted eight years ago but the victim shaming continues.

Once, when I was having a break down, my roommate suggested I was young and didn't know what I was doing. Why suggest I had done anything wrong? I was sitting on the steps of my high school, waiting on my ride to pick me up.

Only through years of counseling am I able to understand that it was not my fault. I still work to forgive myself at every counseling appointment.

It hurts my heart to know victims going through the recovery process are still led to

believe they played a role in some way.

Every day is a struggle for a survivor.

I continue to struggle with my self-confidence, body image, ability to trust others and to maintain a romantic relationship. The list goes on and on.

The honest reason why I am still alive today is because of my family. They never questioned me. They only gave me love and found help for me.

Along my journey, I found friends who love me and a man who stands by my side.

For victims reading this I hope you find strength to tell someone and begin the healing processes you deserve. You CAN regain control. I am sending you love and strength.

