

MINUTES
Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners Advisory Committee
September 5, 2019

The Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners Advisory Committee met at 225 Spring Street, Wethersfield, Fourth Floor, OVS Conference Room, from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Members in Attendance: Linda J. Cimino, Dr. Alexis Cordiano, Denise Covington, Marielle Daniels, Heather Deming, Beth Hamilton, Brittany Kaplan, Mary Nielson, Dr. Stephanie Paulmeno, DNP, Natasha Pierre, Maureen Platt, Dr. Guy Vallaro

Members Excused or Absent: Edith Atwerebour

OVS Staff Present: Pat Moriarty, Jean M. Weisbrod

Agenda:

1. Welcome and Introductions

Chair Linda J. Cimino called the meeting to order at 2:05 p.m. and welcomed members to the first meeting of the Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners Advisory Committee. Members introduced themselves.

Linda stated that this is a working Advisory Committee and all thoughts and ideas are welcome. She provided an overview of the Office of Victim Services.

2. Review of Materials and Advisory Committee Charge

Members received a binder that included the Member Contact List, 2019-2020 term meeting schedule, September Special Session, Public Act No. 09-3, Public Act No. 17-99, Public Act No. 18-83, Public Act No. 19-114, Public Act No. 19-118, SAFE Program Overview, C.G.S. 19a-112a to 19a-112g, SAFE Program Overview, State of Connecticut Technical Guidelines For Health Care Response to Victims of Sexual Assault, and the National Protocol for Sexual Assault Medical Forensic Exams. Linda reviewed the materials with the Committee.

Linda reviewed the statutory charge of the Committee and the Office of Victim Services as delineated in the implementing legislation in Section 5 of their binders.

3. Review of the SAFE Program collaboration with the Alliance to End Sexual Violence

Beth Hamilton discussed Gail Burns-Smith, founder of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, now known as The CT Alliance to End Sexual Violence. She provided an overview of the history of services provided to victims before the SAFE Program was formed.

Beth discussed the benefits of the SAFE Program such as a sexual assault advocate will be initiated when a patient presents in the Emergency Department (ED), program language is patient/victim centered, and it will build credibility with Hospital Emergency Departments. She added that standardization is going to increase the success of the patient.

4. Review of the Commission on the Standardization of the Collection of Evidence in Sexual Assault Investigations

Maureen Platt discussed the Commission on the Standardization of the Collection of Evidence in Sexual Assault Investigations which consists of 15 members from victims groups, ED physician, gynecologist, pediatrician, chief of police, law enforcement, and the forensic lab. She explained the focus of the group was the development and revision of the Technical Guidelines.

She discussed the process to calculate the number of kits to determine reimbursement, the strict timeline to transport kits and the tracking system so victims can gain access to result of the kit using a code. She also discussed the forensic interview video system which eliminates the need for a victim to repeat their experience multiple times.

5. Review of the Forensic Lab's partnership with the SAFE Program

Dr. Guy Vallaro explained that the Forensic Science Laboratory is part of the Division of Scientific Services of the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection.

He discussed the Bureau of Justice Assistance's Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI) funding. The grant program addresses the growing number of sexual assault kits in law enforcement custody and to provide resolution when possible.

Dr. Vallaro also discussed the task force designed to work on policies and procedures for things such as victim notification and training for CT100 and CT400. He also brought samples of sexual assault kits over the years.

6. Review of the SAFE Program

Denise Covington discussed the establishment of the SAFE Program, the background, Public Act No. 09-3, and founder Gail Burns-Smith.

Denise also explained the purpose of the SAFE Program, which is to provide trauma-informed, victim-centered care with efficiency, consistency, and reliability.

She informed members of the benefits of the SAFE Program for patients such as one to one care, unbiased care, the ability to take a legally defensible history, quality forensic exam and evidence collection, the ability to identify assault-related injuries, and perceived as knowledgeable.

Denise discussed the benefits of the program to the EDs such as staff not being called away from assignments, SAFEs have expertise not available to ED staff, and SAFEs have credibility in court.

Denise informed the members that advocates create a partnership on behalf of the patient/victim which can link the patient to ongoing services.

Denise explained that SAFEs are trained on evidentiary issues, the importance of chain of custody, and jurisdictional issues which is beneficial for law enforcement, and SAFEs are able to provide unbiased and credible testimony in criminal proceedings.

Denise discussed that SAFEs are able to identify and locate evidence based on history and know how to avoid contamination of evidence and prevent changes in the physical condition of the evidence.

Denise stated that the goal of the program is develop a cohort of SAFEs in all hospitals across the state of CT.

Members discussed issues related to compensation and barriers.

7. New Business

No new business was introduced.

Linda adjourned the meeting at 4:03 p.m.

Jean M. Weisbrod, Recorder