



D64 Online Sexual Assault Examiner Training: Inaugural Venture in Forensic Education

Constance A. Hoyt, MSN, 49 Birch Meadow Road, Merrimac, MA 01860*

The goal of this presentation is to demonstrate the value of an online education and training program for the preparation of nurses and physicians who desire formal preparation in the performing a forensic sexual assault examination of either victims or suspects.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by sharing the author's experience in creating and teaching a distance learning forensic course to train sexual assault examiners.

This presentation will discuss the development of an online educational program for preparing sexual assault examiners and outline the value of the offering, as well as clinical training issues and problems associated with the non-traditional, online course.

In 2005, the University of California, Riverside (UCR) offered the first online course designed to prepare nurses and other licensed healthcare providers to perform the forensic examination and evidence collection associated with sexual assault victims or suspects. Since this was the initial attempt within the United States to train forensic sexual assault examiners through distance learning, considerable study was done to determine the feasibility of online programming and to identify teaching strategies which would ensure that the program's content and clinical experiences compared favorably to the traditional methods for preparing sexual assault forensic examiners. The intent of the online course was to prepare sexual assault examiners for under-served communities where suitable training courses do not exist, or hardships are imposed for full-time nurses who must incur lost wages and considerable expenses for travel and housing to obtain SANE-A training.

Didactic information and clinical internship experiences were based upon the curricular content of the International Association of Forensic Nurses for the SANE-A (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner-Adult). Curricular materials of California, Massachusetts and other selected states with well-established training programs were also benchmarked to ensure that essential concepts and principles were included, and that those completing the course would be eligible for most existing certification opportunities. However, all students were encouraged to research local and state requirements prior to enrollment, to ensure their subsequent eligibility for certification examinations in their own practice locations since requirements vary widely.

A 60-hour didactic component included demographics and theoretic aspects of sexual assault as well as comprehensive assessment and evidence collection procedures. Photography, videography, acquisition of biological specimens, forensic wound identification and documentation, use of alternative light sources, and medicolegal requirements for evidence security and chain of custody procedures essential for subsequent legal proceedings for both victims and suspected perpetrators. Essentials of working collaboratively with law enforcement, judicial authorities, and social agencies were emphasized, as well as preparation for courtroom testimony related to the forensic examination. A follow-on internship for skill validation is arranged for each student who seeks to be certified as a sexual assault nurse examiner. Course instructors assist in linking participants with appropriate professional resources within their local community. UCR and its instructors maintain oversight throughout the internship to ensure integrity and proper validation of the clinical experiences. Experiences in the internship are carefully designed to ensure that students become well-versed on prevailing local or state statutes pertinent to sexual assault. Unique requirements of the crime lab within their respective practice jurisdiction are also addressed. There are planned interactions with law enforcement, prosecuting and defense attorneys, judges, victim advocacy representatives and other personnel who are involved in various aspects of sexual assault from prevention to long-term victim follow-up. Several opportunities for observations of court proceedings are offered, and other optional experiences may be designed to meet needs of individual students.

The online SANE-A course and its unique internship permit those in remote or rural regions of the United States or other countries to obtain this education and training, and to prepare for practice within the requirements and boundaries of their jurisdictions.

Distance Learning, Online Education, Sexual Assault