



D13 The Role of the Forensic Nurse Examiner and Persons With Disabilities

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be able to: (1) identify the severity of violence in the community of individuals with disabilities; (3) identify the importance of the history and interview, recognize the signs of abuse as it relates to individuals with disabilities; and, (4) recognize the special needs of the individual with disabilities and the role of the forensic nurse or forensic nurse examiner.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by increasing awareness that persons with disabilities represent a population who experiences a greater incidence of abuse.

Historically, persons with disabilities represent a population who experience a greater incidence of abuse or neglect. According to experts, over ninety percent of all persons with disabilities will experience one or more abusive episodes during their lifetime. The reason for this phenomenon is multifaceted and complex. Contributing factors have been identified within the body of research, which includes decreased understanding of their rights, group home or institutional living conditions, lack of boundaries, diminished knowledge, or education level; and stereotyping portrayed by the public. Therefore, raising awareness and educating the public regarding this issue should be a public health priority. Unfortunately, abuse against persons with disabilities is significantly underreported to law enforcement and human service agencies, and even ignored by their family and/or care providers. All too often, the responsibility for identification and reporting of abuse are placed upon the medical community thus leaving the medical provider in this pivotal role.

Forensic nurses are specifically educated to provide professional nursing care; this includes holistically assessing individuals through the nursing process for abuse and neglect. This information provides investigators with valuable details that otherwise would be overlooked. One of the major roles identified within the field of forensic nursing is bridging the gap between the legal and medical arenas; therefore, forensic nurses by nature of their role are uniquely positioned to assist the disabled individual who may be experiencing abuse or neglect. Furthermore, it is this reason that the forensic nurse is such a significant element of any medical examination or in any situation where another medical person suspects abuse or neglect. The forensic nurse is educated as a registered nurse and trained in forensics. Through the application of forensic principles related to evidence collection, the forensic nurse documents injury through multiple means; thereby, assisting the investigator and exploring the possibility of abuse and neglect with the patient. Additionally, the forensic nurse provides community resources that are customized for the disabled individual based on the nurse's assessment. Moreover, safety issues, mandatory reporting, and protection for this vulnerable population is one of the primary function that a forensic nurse provides in their plan of care.

This presentation will examine the many indicators of abuse and neglect that medical providers and investigators should be aware of regarding abuse with specific focus on the disabled population. Through case presentation, the attendee will identify through comparative analysis, accidental versus non-accidental injuries. Additionally, a statistical review will reveal disabled individuals as the prevalent vulnerable population. Moreover, it will provide the audience with a greater knowledge base and a greater understanding of the victimization within this population. The forensic nurse's role will be investigated and clear delineations will be given regarding the significant responsibility the forensic nurse holds and contributes in abuse investigations with disabled individuals. Specific information will be provided regarding the offender profile and the process of reporting and documenting information. However, the greatest focus will be the significant impact the forensic nurse can make regarding investigations concerning individuals with disabilities.

Abuse, Disabilities, Forensic Nurse