



### E31 Collaboration in Action—A Case Study on Implementing the National Best Practices for Sexual Assault Kits: A Multidisciplinary Approach Recommendations

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**Learning Overview:** After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the process from a Mountain West state in successfully implementing the *National Best Practices for Sexual Assault Kits: A Multidisciplinary Approach* recommendations in the instructions, guidelines, and content in their statewide sexual assault kits.

**Impact on the Forensic Science Community:** This presentation will impact the forensic science community by encouraging collaboration between forensic scientists, forensic medical/nursing examiners, and other multidisciplinary partners in implementing the *National Best Practices for Sexual Assault Kits: A Multidisciplinary Approach* recommendations.

**Synopsis:** In 2013, Congress passed the Sexual Assault Forensic Evidence Reporting (SAFER) Act, which recommended the development of national best practices and protocols related to sexual assault kits.<sup>1</sup> The SAFER Working Group, comprised of multidisciplinary subject matter experts, was created to generate collaborative best practice guidelines. After multiple in-person and virtual meetings over two years, the United States Department of Justice released the SAFER Working Group's recommendations in the *National Best Practices for Sexual Assault Kits: A Multidisciplinary Approach* in August 2017.<sup>2</sup>

Upon release of the *National Best Practices*, forensic scientists and forensic nurses in a Mountain West state (Utah) met to discuss implementation of the multidisciplinary SAFER Working Group recommendations. Specifically, the meetings focused on implementation of recommendations from Chapter 2: The Medical-Forensic Exam and Sexual Assault Evidence Collection. This presentation will explore the process of reviewing the sexual assault evidence collection recommendations in terms of the needs of the community and criminal justice system in Utah. Changes were made to the instructions, guidelines, and content of the sexual assault kits. This presentation will delve into specific changes made to the sexual assault kit content and guidelines, such as including masks for examiners in the sexual assault kits, no more collection of control swabs, and reducing swab numbers to focus on concentrating DNA material on swabs. Education was then disseminated to forensic scientists and forensic nursing and medical teams across the state on the changes and rationale for the changes.

The importance of a strong, collaborative relationship between forensic scientists and forensic nursing/medical examiners will be reinforced with suggestions on how to build local multidisciplinary teams to achieve best practices. Recommendations from *The National Best Practices* document were also used in recent Utah legislative bills regarding the submission and testing of all sexual assault kits and the creation of a tracking system with a victim portal. Thus, the *National Best Practices* document has positively influenced both practice and policy related to sexual assault in Utah.

#### Reference(s):

1. *The Sexual Assault Forensic Evidence Reporting Act of 2013 (SAFER Act)*, P.I. 113-4, 1002, (o)(1).
2. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice, (2017). *The national best practices for sexual assault kits: A multidisciplinary approach*, <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/250384.pdf>.

#### Sexual Assault Kits, Best Practices, Collaboration