

County of Santa Clara
Santa Clara Valley Health & Hospital System
Santa Clara Valley Medical Center



DATE: July 30, 2021

TO: Honorable Members of the Board of Supervisors
Jeffrey V. Smith, M.D., J.D., County Executive

FROM: Paul E. Lorenz, Chief Executive Officer, SCVMC
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SUBJECT: Off Agenda Report on SAFE Response Locations

At the June 30, 2021 Health and Hospital Committee (HHC), following a report from the Santa Clara Valley Medical Center regarding the provision of sexual assault forensic exam (SAFE) services at response locations in Santa Clara County, (Agenda Item 7), Supervisor Simitian directed Administration to provide an off-agenda report on the status of each SAFE response location within the county, regarding immediate and long-term considerations for best practice care of survivors that present for SAFE services.

In Santa Clara County, the primary SAFE response location has been aligned with the SCVMC emergency department (ED) since 1987. Expansion to the north county was prioritized in 2019, and a new SAFE response site was opened at Stanford Health Center ED in February 2020. A response location was also opened in Santa Cruz in collaboration with the Santa Cruz Sheriff and Dominican Hospital.

Consideration for SAFE Program Response

Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners

Qualified healthcare providers, as defined in the California penal code, are trained to provide the components of the SAFE exam, in a manner that supports the acute and chronic consequences for survivors after experiencing sexual violence. Availability of SAFE examiners is a critical component to ensure survivors receive compassionate, competent, confidential, and forensically sound medical care, designed to minimize additional trauma.

Equipment and Supplies

Standard exam room supplies, and patient care equipment are required. Additionally, several key pieces of equipment may be utilized by SAFE nurses during the exam process. Some of these include: 1) digital cameras, 2) colposcope or magnifying instrument, 3) laptop or tablet, 4) drying device, 5) testing and treatment supplies, 6) alternative light source, 7) evidence management materials, and 8) comfort supplies (e.g., soft comfortable clothes, food and beverages, toiletries, etc.).

Sexual Assault Forensic Examination Kit

If a survivor chooses to have evidence collected, a standardized sexual assault evidence collection kit is used. The kit, supplies, and procedures for collection are used in accordance with the California and National Protocols for SAFE exams. Local practice may be further defined in accordance with policies of the receiving criminal laboratory where the kit is processed.

Timing Considerations for Collecting Evidence

In Santa Clara County the window of time for a SAFE exam is within 10 days of an assault. The use of timeframes is supported by empirical evidence; however, there are different time frame cut offs for different types of evidence. As time goes on, these windows have increased due to improved sensitivity of lab testing. If drug facilitated assault is suspected, it is critical to be seen immediately, since the intoxicant may be cleared from the body quickly and may not be detectable after several hours or days. Emergency contraception should be provided as early as possible. Similarly, if there is a concern for HIV exposure, treatment must be started within 72 hours of assault to ensure efficacy. Other types of evidence may be collected up to 10 days after assault but the earlier a survivor is able to be seen, there may be more evidence available to collect.

Evidence Management

Recommendations for preserving evidence must be followed to ensure the integrity of the evidence and chain of custody are maintained. The SAFE examiner must maintain control of the evidence during the medical evidentiary exam and is responsible for drying, packaging, labeling, and sealing the evidence. They must provide sealed evidence to an authorized agent of the jurisdictional agency, following the completion of the medical evidentiary exam. If no law enforcement agent is present to collect evidence, transit to secure storage should be expedited.

Considerations for SAFE Program Response Locations

Several federal and state agencies provide guidance and recommendations regarding optimal site selection for conducting SAFE examinations. Much of the guidance focuses on the SAFE exam, examiner, and/or response; however, it also underscores important

considerations for the location itself. These include: 1) distance from other SAFE response locations to improve service coverage to survivors in that area, 2) 24/7 access to the facility, 3) safety and security of survivors and first responders, 4) physical and psychological comfort for survivors, 5) capacity to accommodate survivors with disabilities, 6) access to laboratory and pharmaceutical resources, and 7) proximity to acute medical services for care beyond the scope of the SAFE examination. By co-locating SAFE response near an ED, all the above considerations are met.

To measure uniform and equitable service at each of the SCVMC SAFE response locations in the counties it serves, a list of criteria is being formalized, based on regulatory requirements, best practice standards, and community input. Examples include:

- Standardized triage screening practice
- Prompt communication with the on-call SAFE examiner to respond or assist when questions arise
- Capacity to partner with SAFE Program to ensure admissions staff is comfortable and resourced to ensure trauma-sensitive practices are used for the survivor until the SAFE examiner arrives
- Availability of on-site lab services if point of care testing is not possible
- Availability of a private, safe, and quiet waiting area for survivors and those accompanying them throughout the exam process
- Availability of a private and secure setting for confidential interviews or history taking
- Availability of a dedicated private exam room and other measures to ensure survivor privacy
- Availability of a dedicated bathroom with shower facilities for the survivor to use after an exam
- Accessibility of environmental cleaning services
- Accessibility of phone, Wi-Fi, and internet
- Identification of point person or persons at each site to participate in ongoing quality assurance related to SAFE service response at that location

Designated SAFE Response Sites in Santa Clara County

Santa Clara Valley Medical Center

SAFE Services at Santa Clara Valley Medical Center (SCVMC) are performed at a dedicated location that meets all the considerations for a SAFE response location. Upcoming renovation of the SCVMC emergency department is not expected to disrupt the dedicated SAFE space or exams that are conducted in that exam space, but some workflow adjustments will need to occur as renovations progress. These will impact the examiner's

process or order of operations but will not be apparent to the survivor, as the exam components and patient-centered approach will remain unchanged.

Stanford Health Care Response Location

Following the June 30, 2021 HHC meeting, discussions with Stanford Health Center (SHC) Administration and ED leadership began immediately. SHC leadership initiated preliminary work to identify and evaluate alternate locations with dedicated space for SAFE exams and survivor privacy. In mid-July 2021, a meeting was held at SHC to discuss the physical environmental assessments underway to identify alternative space that meets criteria for a SAFE response site, and address the concerns raised by members of the public. Several options were discussed, all of which had been selected through thoughtful consideration for survivor needs. A location was identified for study and needs assessment; however, some questions still remain regarding regulatory and renovation requirements before selection of that location can be finalized. Next steps are currently in progress with multiple action items being addressed.

In addition to the activities involving physical space needs, work to enhance the current response to survivors who present to the SHC ED has also begun. Given the mental and physical health consequences of sexual assault and gender-based violence, the initial response to a survivor is a critical component in their trauma recovery. The participants in these discussions are acutely aware of this, especially in response to the issues raised during feedback by the public and by Supervisors Simitian and Lee during the HHC meeting on June 30, 2021. As a result, some immediate modifications were implemented to ensure the survivor's needs and choice for care are identified at the time of initial triage. These include connecting the survivor with the SCVMC on-call SAFE nurse during the initial triage screening, rather than waiting for law enforcement to arrive, and ensuring the availability of a safe, private, and confidential space for the patient to wait while the SAFE nurse and confidential advocate are en route. Additional improvements and training are being reviewed to help with long term changes and stability of practices that are trauma responsive. The effort that SHC leadership has put into finding solutions, and their continued willingness to collaborate with SCVMC to optimize the workflow for survivors, has been evident and greatly appreciated. We look forward to anticipated next steps in this effort.

St. Louise Regional Hospital Response Location

Work continues with St. Louise Hospital administration and the various departments that will be involved with SAFE response in the south county. Meetings with staff from registration and the emergency department were held to review SAFE workflow needs, locations for confidential space on arrival, and medical screening. Representatives from hospital administration, medical staff, pharmacy, registration, and environmental services provided a tour of the dedicated space that has been identified for SAFE exams. Based on all current communications, St. Louise will meet the criteria for a SAFE response location but

final approval from the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) for use of the identified space is pending.

Non-SAFE Response Hospitals

Workflows for transfer recommendations have not been formalized for use by facilities where the SAFE Program does not respond. Consideration for establishing transfer guidance will be addressed to include priorities for comfort and protection of evidence during transfer. Currently, outside facilities contact the SAFE Program or the SCVMC ED to discuss options or arrange transfer on a case-by-case basis.