

IAFN Applauds Recent GAO Report and Calls Upon Congress to Act

April 27, 2016 - On April 14, 2016, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report titled “***Sexual Assault: Information on Training, Funding and the Availability of Forensic Examiners.***” The GAO was asked to the availability of sexual assault nurse examiners (SANEs) and other forensic examiners after concerns were raised about the lack of availability of such specialists on the front lines of treating victims of sexual assault, domestic violence and elder abuse.

“The report issued by the GAO on the availability of forensic examiners, including SANEs, demonstrates the need for Congress to take up legislation to address these issues before the end of this 114th Congress,” stated IAFN President Dee Krebs. “IAFN urges enactment of the Justice for All Act Reauthorization (S.2577/H.R.4602), bipartisan legislation in the House and Senate to address this problem. Victims of abuse must have appropriate access to support and services, including access to a forensic nurse/sexual assault nurse examiner.”

In order to function in the role of SANE, a provider must complete specific didactic and clinical training. Once that is completed, in order to maintain competency, the SANE must clinically function in the role. While initial classroom or online training programs are readily available through IAFN and other education providers, the health care facility may not provide any financial support for nurses to attend. Obtaining the necessary clinical training and ongoing continuing education can also be extremely difficult. IAFN recently began partnering with sites across the country to offer hands on clinical skills training for SANEs who have completed their didactic requirements, and provides technical assistance with regard to the US Department of Justice’s National Protocol for Sexual Assault Medical Forensic Examinations.

The GAO’s report highlighting six states accurately represents the challenges faced in many communities across the US, with particular challenges in rural and urban underserved population. The report highlights the challenge of garnering stakeholder support for these services. Specifically support in the healthcare sector. Many hospitals are reluctant to devote resources such as call pay or education resources to SANEs because they don’t believe they see many victims,

or they believe the issue is solely a criminal justice one and not also an issue of health. The fact is sexual assault victims of all ages present regularly to health care agencies. These patients present with both acute and long term physical and mental health effects from having been victimized. Without SANEs they are often interacting with providers that have little to no training with regard to sexual assault and its health implications, or the treatment options available to these patients. It is our hope that this report will begin to change the dialogue with regard to the health care system's obligation to effectively address sexual violence as the health issue it is, including training and support for providers, improved reimbursement rates for medical forensic evaluations and expanded clinical coverage for other vulnerable victims of violence, including domestic violence and elder abuse patients.

IAFN is a professional organization comprised of forensic nurses and other professionals around the world who support and compliment the work of forensic nursing. Our mission is to provide leadership in forensic nursing practice by developing, promoting, and disseminating information internationally about forensic nursing science. For more information about the Association and SANE training please visit the website at www.ForensicNurses.org. Press should contact Jen Pierce-Weeks at jpw@forensicnurses.org.