We Applaud Test Pattern

We applaud writer and director Shatara Michelle Ford for taking on the challenging topic of what a victim of sexual assault experiences when trying to access comprehensive medical forensic examination and treatment.

Test Pattern features the frustration the victim and their loved ones feel as they search for an emergency department that has a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) who is trained to conduct an examination and collect evidence.

Because so many individuals experience sexual abuse and assault, we want to highlight some “truths” that go beyond what was portrayed in the movie:

- The main character, Renesha (Brittany Hall), has suffered what is commonly referred to as a drug-facilitated sexual assault, accurately depicting the emotional trauma many survivors feel. Like most victims of sexual assault, she does not have any obvious physical injury. This does not and should not diminish the validity of the trauma, nor its effects. Regardless of the level of injury, every person deserves to be treated in a trauma-informed way.
- No individual who seeks care after experiencing sexual trauma should be turned away.
- It is imperative that healthcare systems understand patient rights, including reporting options. These may vary by location. Automatic reporting of a sexual assault to law enforcement without an adult patient’s express consent could be a violation of the patient’s rights.
- Test Pattern realistically depicts the process of consent for a sexual assault exam by a SANE. Consent is a process—and involves more than a signature on a form. The patient’s choice should guide all aspects of the exam, evidence collection, and treatment.
- The movie does not show the role of the advocate, but they serve as a critical component of comprehensive sexual assault care. Most communities have sexual assault advocates; their primary responsibility is to provide emotional support and resources both during the exam, and more importantly in the months and sometimes years that follow. To find your local advocacy services in the US, call 1 (800) 656-HOPE or go online at https://centers.rainn.org/. If you have been sexually assaulted outside the US, you can find assistance at https://pathwaystosafety.org/get-help-now/
- Although the film portrays the challenges to accessing care, it does not highlight the many health consequences associated with sexual assault, such as sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, and pregnancy risk and prevention. A comprehensive sexual assault exam addresses these issues.
- Violence is a healthcare issue. Forensic nursing is the specialty that addresses the human health consequences of violence and takes measures for potential criminal justice intervention.
- If your hospital needs training in how to effectively respond to and treat patients who have experienced sexual assault, please contact the International Association of Forensic Nurses at sane365@forensicnurses.org or www.forensicnurses.org