

Human Sex Trafficking in the Clinical setting

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Learning objectives

- The learner should be able to identify the practical steps for dealing with a human sex trafficking situation in real time.



- Conflicts of interest: none (except that my wife and I have a son, two daughters, and a grandson)

Human sex trafficking in the clinical setting

Outline: the 6-step method

1. **Identify** the patient as a potentially trafficked person
2. **Separate** the patient from their potential trafficker
3. **Assess** the situation
 - a. Are they truly being trafficked?
 - b. Are they willing to accept help today?
 - c. Special cases: minority, sexual assault
 - d. What to do if they refuse help at this time?
4. **Contact** your backup
5. **Deal with** the trafficker
6. **Document** the visit thoroughly

Human sex trafficking

Introduction

- Human sex trafficking is the use of **force, fraud, or coercion** to control another person for the purpose of engaging in commercial sex acts (this includes commercial pornography).
- If the trafficked person is a **minor**, force, fraud, or coercion are not necessary. That is to say, using a minor in a commercial sex venture is automatically human sex trafficking.
- Human sex trafficking is not the same (although it may coexist with) as intimate partner violence (domestic violence) or sexual assault.

Step 1:

Identify the patient as a potential HST victim

- “Red flags” for HST will be extensively discussed today.
- But, remember that the trafficking victim can look like the girl (or boy) next door, and the trafficker can look like your grandmother.
- Some clues to look for:
 - Demographic clues: migrant status, no fixed abode, problematic ID, etc.
 - Behavioral clues:
 - Controlling behavior by the other
 - Poor eye contact, inappropriate attire, etc.
 - Overt psychological distress (especially PTSD symptoms)
 - Clinical clues:
 - History: multiple STIs, multiple unwanted pregnancies, recurrent UTIs
 - Physical exam: branding, bruises, multiple fractures, malnutrition, poor dental hygiene

Step 2:

Separate the patient from the trafficker

- Remember that the trafficker can be a family member or a woman
- This requires finesse and subtlety:
 - “The front office requires more information.”
 - “He’ll need to step out while we perform a pelvic exam.”
 - “We’ll need to get a urine specimen.”
 - “I’ll have to send her for an X-ray.”
- This is a potentially dangerous situation.
 - Have a low threshold for calling the APD or security.

Step 3a: Assessing the situation

Are they truly being trafficked?

- A staff chaperone from your office should always be present.
- Your approach should be empathetic and kind, not blaming.
- Your first goal: to establish rapport
- Remember: the patient is in control.
- Start with open-ended questions:
 - Where do you eat and sleep?
 - Can you come and go as you please?
 - Do you get to keep your own ID?
 - Are you “in the game” or “in the life”?

Step 3b: Assessing the situation

Are they willing to accept help?

- Assure them that help is available.
 - They can be removed from their situation if they wish.
- They are not in trouble, but you may have to contact the APD.
 - Not to arrest them (going to the doctor is not an offense)
 - But to deal with the trafficker out in the waiting room.
 - They do not have to press charges against their trafficker(s).
 - SVU officers are specifically trained to deal with HST victims.
- The patient will need to provide informed consent.
- If they are on the fence, or if they decide to accept help, it's time to contact an advocacy organization (proceed to Step 4).
 - Family Support Services OR No Boundaries International

Step 3c: Assessing the situation

2 special cases

- If the patient is a minor...
 - You will need to inform St. Francis Ministries (formerly CPS) within 48 hours.
 - You will need to contact the Texas Abuse and Neglect Hotline.
 - If there is an immediate threat, contact the APD (call 911).
- If the patient needs a SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner) exam...
 - That is to say, if there has been a sexual assault (within the past 7 days)
 - For this, you will need to send the patient to an ER (either NCTH or BSA)
 - If you contact the ER ahead of time, they will inform security and expedite the patient's admission to the ER.
 - APD will usually transport the patient (i.e., a crime has been committed).

Step 3d: Assessing the situation

What if they refuse help?

- You should assure the patient that help is always available.
- FSS or NBI will come out to counsel with the patient, even if the patient is not ready to leave the life.
- If the patient doesn't want to wait, you should provide contact information:
 - Give a general list of support services
 - It should include No Boundaries International and Family Support Services
 - It should include the national Human Sex Trafficking hotline
- Consider scheduling a short-interval follow-up visit:
 - Ostensibly to check on lab or X-ray results
 - In reality, you are trying to establish rapport

Step 4: Contacting backup

- Advocacy organizations for HST patients:
 - No Boundaries International: 806-576-2501
 - Family Support Services: 806-342-2500 (after hours, 806-374-5433)
 - For minors, The Bridge offers outpatient counselling: 806-372-2873
- These organizations can help organize emergency lodging, food, counseling, etc.
- If you are at the hospital, your clinical social workers will be able to help you make these arrangements.

Step 5: If the patient accepts help,
you still have to deal with that trafficker
out in the waiting room!

- Don't neglect the safety of yourself and your staff.
- For this, you should contact the APD (call 911) or hospital/clinic security.

Step 6: Finally, document!

- Drs. Baker and Anderson will provide detailed suggestions for this.
- Use quotation marks for direct patient statements.
- Include a clinical assessment, i.e. “suspected human trafficking.”
- These notes may be used in court.

Important phone numbers

- Advocacy
 - No Boundaries International: 806-576-2501
 - Family Support Services: 806-342-2500
 - FSS 24 hour crisis hotline: 806-374-5433
- National Human Trafficking hotline
 - 1-888-373-7888
- For minors:
 - Texas Abuse and Neglect Hotline: 1-800-252-5400
 - St. Francis Ministries (formerly CPS): 806-553-4276
 - The Bridge: 806-372-2873

