

Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) Education and Certification

International Association of Forensic Nurses

Statement of Problem: More than 40 years ago, rape crisis advocates and healthcare professionals identified persistent problems with the health care provided to individuals who had experienced sexual assault. As early as the 1970s, education for emergency department (ED) personnel who conducted the exams was non-existent, as were evidence collection protocols, adding to the challenges facing prosecution (Morse, 2018). Clinicians were inadequately trained in the complex health needs of survivors, patients often waited hours to receive care, and if the case happened to progress through the criminal justice system to trial, clinicians were frequently reluctant to testify. The development of sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE) programs offered a targeted solution to many of these problems. As the health consequences of sexual assault—and its effect on individuals, families, communities, and organizations—have become better understood, legislation continues to be proposed regarding the best care of this patient population and who should provide that care. Healthcare systems and policy-makers are identifying forensic nurses with specialized education in sexual assault as the appropriate caregivers.

In 2002, the International Association of Forensic Nurses (IAFN) developed and awarded the first board certification for SANEs caring for the adult/adolescent population (e.g., the SANE-A®), followed in 2007 by a certification for those caring for the pediatric population (e.g., the SANE-P®). Designed for the SANE-educated registered or advanced practice nurse who has been working in the role of a SANE, the certification recognizes nurses who demonstrate the highest standards of forensic nursing practice and validates their knowledge of the care required for this unique patient population. Many educated and practicing SANEs are not certified.

Association Position: A registered or advanced practice nurse who acts in the specialized and expanded practice role of a SANE by providing care to adult, adolescent, or pediatric patients should complete a minimum 40-hour curriculum in keeping with the population served, that addresses the content outlined in the *Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Education Guidelines* (IAFN, 2018). The training should comport with the *National Protocol for Sexual Assault Medical Forensic Examinations: Pediatric* (DOJ, 2016), the *National Protocol for Sexual Assault Medical Forensic*

Examinations: Adult/Adolescent (DOJ, 2013), the *National Training Standards for Sexual Assault Medical Forensic Examiners 2nd Edition* (DOJ, 2018), the *Forensic Nursing Scope and Standards of Practice 2nd Edition* (ANA and IAFN, 2017), and the World Health Organization *Responding to intimate partner violence and sexual violence against women: WHO clinical and policy guidelines* (WHO, 2013). To reinforce the didactic education and build competency, clinical education should follow the 40-hour course. If a nurse has not met these criteria, that nurse should refrain from referring to themselves as a “SANE” or even as “SANE-educated.”

The IAFN SANE certifications were not developed to be an entry-level standard for performing sexual assault examinations. Certification is not required before a registered or advanced practice nurse may practice as a sexual assault nurse examiner.

Rationale: As stated in the *National Protocol for Sexual Assault Medical Forensic Examinations: Adult/Adolescent* (DOJ, 2013), the care of the patient who has experienced sexual assault is unique; it requires both the provision of patient-centered and comprehensive healthcare, and the preservation of the evidentiary material that may be used by the criminal justice system. Patients who seek care at facilities that lack SANEs or other appropriately educated healthcare clinicians are frequently re-traumatized and their immediate and long-term healthcare needs remain unmet (Campbell 2008). To provide comprehensive care for these patients, a registered nurse must receive specialized education in the provision of trauma-informed care, complex patient assessment, identifying risks and providing prevention for short- and long-term physical and psychological sequelae, reproductive and sexual healthcare and treatment, forensic documentation, evidence collection, and expert witness testimony. Registered and advanced practice nurses who receive this expert education are the appropriate clinicians to conduct a medical-forensic examination and to provide the specialized care that is necessary for individuals who have experienced sexual assault. Members of the public have come to recognize and trust nurses functioning in the SANE role. To maintain the public’s trust, nurses using the SANE title should adhere to the requirement stated above.

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