



Backgrounder FORENSIC NURSING

About

- Forensic nurses are registered nurses (RNs) or advanced practice nurses (APNs) who have received specialized education and training to address the acute and long-term health consequences and criminal justice needs of patients impacted by violence.
- A forensic nurse is often one of the first professionals to provide medical care to a victim of violence and is trained to coordinate the resources necessary to address both the medical needs of the individual, and if appropriate, the evidentiary needs of the victim for potential use in the criminal justice system.
- Forensic nurses provide specialized care for patients who are experiencing acute and long-term health consequences associated with victimization such as domestic or intimate partner violence (IPV), sexual assault and rape, dating violence and abuse, peer violence, physical and mental abuse, sexual coercion, stalking, child and elder maltreatment, human trafficking, and homicide. The forensic nurse also addresses any unmet evidentiary needs and provides consultation and testimony for civil and criminal proceedings relative to nursing practice, care given, and opinions rendered regarding health findings.
- A Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) is a registered or advanced practice nurse who has been specially trained to provide comprehensive care to sexual assault survivors. A SANE demonstrates competency in conducting a medical forensic examination and has the ability to be an expert witness.
- Forensic nurses play a critical role in the multidisciplinary response to violence in the community, providing trauma-informed patient care of individuals at the intersection of healthcare and the criminal justice system. This coordinated team response reduces patient/victim trauma, increases patients' access to services, improves the experience of the patient seeking help, and strengthens participation and outcomes in the legal system.

Healthcare for Victims of Violence

- Having access to a trained forensic nurse can positively impact short- and long-term health outcomes for a patient who is a victim of violence. This is particularly applicable to those individuals from historically underserved populations such as ethnic and cultural minorities, people with disabilities or mental health disorders, and sexual and gender minorities who face serious access-to-care barriers following violent victimization.
- Patients impacted by violence and trauma, including other forms of exploitation and abuse, experience acute and long-term health consequences associated with that victimization. Clinical studies demonstrate patients experiencing violence are more likely to experience depression,



substance use, posttraumatic stress disorder, and other chronic conditions than the general population, and early intervention can lead to both better long-term outcomes and lower costs.

- Anyone can experience trauma. Everyone in every community deserves a trauma-informed response. Health systems must ensure they meet the healthcare needs of the survivor, whether or not evidence collection is part of the equation; advocates must put the emotional and physical needs of the survivor at the center of their response; and the criminal justice system must prove that the system really can work to hold offenders accountable. More health systems than ever before are establishing forensic nursing programs to properly care for patients who have experienced sexual assault and other forms of violence. More healthcare providers are asking their patients about the role violence has played in their lives and health, and more patients are disclosing their assault histories—in emergency rooms, pediatricians' offices, urgent care clinics, primary care offices, maternity wards, and even dental offices.

Forensic Nurse Roles

- Forensic nurses routinely care for patients located within both the health and criminal justice systems, performing services at hospitals, clinics, community anti-violence programs, advocacy centers, coroners' and medical examiners' offices, corrections institutions, and psychiatric hospitals.
- Forensic nurses work as a forensic nurse examiners, forensic psychiatric nurses, geriatric forensic nurses, or correctional nurses.
- Forensic nurse roles within the legal system include forensic nurse investigator (death investigator), nurse coroner, legal nurse consultant, and nurse attorney.

Training & Certification

- Two SANE certifications are offered by the International Association of Forensic Nurses (IAFN) in collaboration with the American Nurses Credentialing Center, the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner-Adult/Adolescent (SANE-A®) and the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner-Pediatric/Adolescent (SANE-P®). Certification is open to nurses with active, unrestricted RN licensure, with a minimum of two year's work experience as an RN for adults and three years for pediatrics.
- The SANE certification includes a didactic course, a nurse preceptorship and/or 300 clinical hours in forensic nursing, and an exam.
- The Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) certificate program offered by IAFN may be completed by any RN.