



WOMEN'S HEALTH

Rape Is An Emergency: Why Immediate Medical Care Is Critical

(NAPSA)—Every two minutes in America, another woman is sexually assaulted and an estimated two-thirds of these attacks go unreported. About 25 percent of sexual assault victims wait more than 24 hours before seeking medical care.

“Emergency physicians do all we can to provide rape survivors with a kind and reassuring examination and treatment,” said Lucy Gibney, M.D., of American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP). “But the evaluation is a real challenge if the victim does not seek medical attention immediately after the assault.”

Seeking immediate care is critically important to an emergency physician’s ability to obtain documentation and evidence of the sexual assault for legal purposes and at the same time to help reduce victims’ posttraumatic stress. In an emergency department, rape survivors will receive a complete medical and sexual assault evidence exam. Patients can be tested for sexually transmitted diseases, HIV and pregnancy. When preventative treatments are needed, they must be started immediately to be effective, especially to prevent HIV.

Unfortunately, emergency physicians find that rape victims often delay seeking medical attention because they feel ashamed or scared. Rape survivors must understand they have been victimized and a timely visit to the emergency department is critical to pro-



tecting the victim’s health and in convicting the perpetrator. To maximize the ability of emergency physicians to capture important forensic evidence, ACEP suggests rape victims avoid the following actions after the rape.

- Bathing or showering
- Brushing teeth or gargling
- Eating, drinking, chewing gum
- Smoking
- Taking medication
- Changing clothes
- Using the restroom
- Vomiting
- Douching or removing or inserting a tampon
- Wiping or cleaning genital area

“No one expects to be a rape victim, but sadly it is happening in startling numbers across the country,” said Dr. Gibney. “It is crucial for people to know what to do in order to get help in this type of emergency.”