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Georgia College grant aims to tackle sexual assault nurse examiner shortage

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On any given day, an estimated 20,000 phone calls come into domestic violence hotlines across the country, according to the National Network to End Domestic Violence. On top of that, 45 percent of female rape victims and 29 percent of male victims were raped by an intimate partner.

Resources to serve domestic or sexual abuse victims can sometimes be scarce, especially in rural areas. Of the more than 80,000 registered nurses in the state, few are trained in the specialized care of the victim of domestic violence and sexual assault. The Georgia College School of Nursing is helping to bridge that gap.

The Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE) campus-based training program, funded by an \$803,000 grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), began in fall of 2018. It covers the cost of classroom and

clinical training, professional organization membership, certification and continued education for nurses.

Only 20 of these grants were awarded nationwide, with Georgia College being the only organization in the state to receive these federal funds.



Dr. Josie Doss (right) wrote the grant.

“Women’s health is my clinical specialty, and I have always had an interest in forensics nursing. This training grant was a perfect opportunity to blend those roles with my role as a nurse educator at Georgia College,” said Dr. Josie Doss, associate professor of nursing and writer of the grant.

The training program follows the educational guidelines of the International Association of Forensic Nursing (IAFN). Nurses participate in online and clinical skills training related to medical-forensic history, medical-forensic exam, evidence collection, documentation and professional court testimony.

Grant partners include Navicent Baldwin and the Georgia Department of Public Health. Both serve as clinical practice sites and pools for recruitment of qualified nurses who want to become SANE certified.

“We specifically partnered with Navicent Baldwin because of the rural setting and a positive long-standing practice partnership,” said Doss. “Much of the clinical training takes place in the Georgia College Simulation and Translational Research Center within the facility.”

“The Department of Public Health was another conscious choice because of a long standing practice partnership and the clinical practice opportunities they provide. In reciprocation for the clinical practice opportunities, we are able to provide Department of Health Nurses priority admission to the training program and place trained professionals in an environment where they may be able to reach victims who would not otherwise seek care.”

Since implementation of the program, additional practice partnerships have been established or are being pursued with local, free-standing sexual assault centers including Bright House, a division of Southern Crescent Sexual Assault and Child Abuse, which recently opened in Milledgeville and Crisis Line Safe House in Macon/Warner Robins.

The impact of sexual violence goes far beyond that of any physical injuries with

emotional and psychological effects lasting a lifetime.



Nurse takes a swab

“The long-term impacts of domestic violence and sexual assault can be severe,” said Doss. “Research indicates having well-trained medical professionals with an understanding of the neurobiology of trauma can reduce the long and short-term consequences.”

In most cases, the sexual assault nurses are victim’s very first contact with health care after this incident has happened.

“The way they are treated is really important as far as their long-term recovery and their long-term mental health,” said Doss.

Twenty-year nursing veteran Kimberly Griffin sees herself as a helper. The nurse practitioner with the Department of Public Health’s North Central Health District was one of the first students to enroll in the SANE program. She said becoming SANE certified gives her another opportunity to help the community she’s a part of.

“

The big thing for me is that I want to do more as a nurse practitioner. There are shortcomings in care for patients. I want to identify these problems, and to do that, I know I need additional training to be able to step back, identify it as an

”

Being a public health nurse allows her to understand and see her community better.

“Working in public health, you see things in a broader sense. It’s a community, and you start to see trends.”

Georgia College has worked with multiple organizations across the nation and the state to identify trainees. Currently, 16 nurses have completed didactic and clinical skills SANE training with another 21 currently enrolled. After the completion of clinical practice hours, students have the option to become certified by taking an exam demonstrating advanced competency in the field.

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