



**New York City Council Hearing**

**Trauma Informed Care for Survivors of Rape and Sexual  
Assault in NYC Health + Hospitals System**

**Committee on Hospitals**

**Wendy Wilcox, MD**

**Chief Women's Health Officer**

**NYC Health + Hospitals**

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Good afternoon Chairwoman Narcisse and members of the Committee on Hospitals. I am Dr. Wendy Wilcox, Chief Women's Health Officer at NYC Health and Hospitals (H+H). I am joined by my colleague Dr. Brigitte Alexander, Emergency Medicine Physician and Director of Forensic Clinical Services at NYC Health and Hospitals/Kings County, and colleagues from NYC Health + Hospitals/Correctional Health Services. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this very important topic. As the largest safety net provider in New York City, H+H is proud to provide high-quality care to all New Yorkers, regardless of background or ability to pay. Sadly, many of the communities that H+H serves are affected by violence, including rape and sexual assault. H+H stands ready to provide trauma informed care to survivors, in the short-term and well as the long-term.

H+H recognizes that the experience of sexual assault, in addition to its physical toll, can leave deep emotional and psychological scars, which makes trauma informed care of the utmost importance. Key components of trauma informed care include: creating a safe and welcoming environment, engaging in active listening and empathy, recognizing the impact of trauma, empowering survivors through collaborative care, integrating mental health support, and connecting survivors to community resources.

All 11 of the system's acute care facilities are designated by the NYS Department of Health as Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner (SAFE) centers of excellence. There are Sexual Assault Response Teams (SART) at every one of our emergency departments who have gone through intensive training, which includes training in trauma informed care, and been approved by the NYS Department of Health. Their tasks include: properly identifying, collecting and storing forensic evidence, accurately documenting injuries, and attending to the significant emotional needs of survivors. SAFEs come from multiple disciplines and include physicians, nurses, and physicians' assistants.

When a patient reports a sexual assault, they are connected with a social worker and/or advocate regardless of whether or not they meet evidence collection criteria. If the criteria are met, and the patient wants the evidence to be collected, a SAFE is called and completes the evaluation. The SAFE performs a thorough evaluation including a physical examination and medical history to ensure the patient's health and safety and collect evidence of the crime.

Following the examination, the patient is provided with medication to prevent unwanted pregnancy and/or HIV and other STIs. If the patient desires, the social worker and/or advocate can connect the patient to law enforcement. When a patient is discharged, H+H offers follow-up care either at an H+H facility or at one

of five Family Justice Centers (FJCs) throughout the boroughs. At the Family Justice Centers, survivors can receive mental health support, assistance with orders of protection, and other resources. Treatment, including evidence collection and follow-up care, is provided free of charge, regardless of insurance status or ability to pay.

H+H is proud to be on the cutting edge of providing services to survivors. In 2022, NYC Health + Hospitals/Kings County launched the Clinical Forensic Medicine Fellowship, a one-year training program designed to build leaders in the field of clinical forensics for emergency medicine. The fellowship teaches clinicians to identify and care for victims of violence and trauma, prevent the destruction of potential evidence, assist in legal proceedings, and recognize and document patterns of violence and abusive behavior. This fellowship will expand emergency clinicians' ability to be trauma-informed, patient-centric, and culturally sensitive when interacting with patients. The fellowship is truly a collaborative effort between agencies and organizations, including: NYC Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME), The Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence, NYPD Special Victims Division, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, SUNY Downstate Medical University, Kings County DA's Office, CASA-NYC, Family Justice Center, and Kings Against Violence Initiative (KAVI). H+H

also offers a Child Abuse Pediatrics Fellowship at Bellevue (a partnership with Maimonides), which is the only Child Abuse Pediatrics fellowship in NYC. This accredited 3-year fellowship trains pediatricians on all aspects of sexual assault diagnosis and treatment for children 0-18, along with physical abuse and neglect.

H+H is committed to providing compassionate and comprehensive trauma-informed care to survivors of sexual assault. In accordance with the principles of trauma informed care, we will continue our work to create safe and welcoming spaces for survivors, empower survivors in their care decisions, and ensure that survivors receive long-term support. Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to testify and for your continued support of Health + Hospitals. I look forward to our continued partnership and am happy to answer any questions you may have.