
FORT BEND COUNTY SEXUAL ASSAULT RESPONSE TEAM

2023 BIENNIAL REPORT

The Fort Bend County SART Team

To contact the SART Team email Kaitlin.kaufmann@fbctx.gov

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
SART Overview	4
Mission.....	4
Values	4
Outline of Activities and Trainings	7
Pocket Guide for Police Responding to Adult Sexual Assault Cases.....	8
Data and Findings	9
Fort Bend County Adult Sexual Assault Response Team Protocol.....	12
Evaluation of Protocols: Case Review	21
Conclusion.....	22

Executive Summary

The Fort Bend County Sexual Assault Response Team collaborates to improve the county-wide response to sexual assault. This report delves into the comprehensive protocols that the team worked to create and the data that we have since collected. The findings underscore the need for a more cohesive and victim-centered framework.

It is generally accepted that the number of sexual assaults that occur far outweigh the number actually reported and prosecuted (Texas Statewide Sexual Assault Prevalence Study, August 2015). As a team, we met regularly to establish the protocol and discuss issues that arise in sexual assault cases with the aim of identifying different stages where attrition in victim participation occurs and steps we can take to decrease the attrition.

Key Takeaways:

Interagency Collaboration: The report underscores the importance of seamless collaboration among law enforcement, forensic nurses, victim advocacy organizations, and the DA's Office. Coordinated efforts are essential to streamline the response, increasing the comfort of victims throughout the process.

Timely and Compassionate Response: Data shows that the initial response phase significantly impacts victim participation. Delays, lack of sensitivity, and communication breakdowns contribute to attrition. The report reiterates the necessity of victim-centered response to mitigate these challenges.

Comprehensive Training Programs: There is a need for training programs for stakeholders involved in sexual assault cases. Training should focus not only on legal and investigative aspects but also on trauma-informed approaches to create a more supportive environment for survivors.

Improved Data Collection and Analysis: The report emphasizes the importance of robust data collection methods to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of response protocols. Comprehensive data should be collected at each stage of the process, allowing agencies to identify bottlenecks, attrition and areas for improvement.

Enhancing Victim Trust and Confidentiality: Building and maintaining trust is paramount for survivors to engage in the justice system. The report suggests adopting measures to decrease the time that investigations and prosecution takes and empowering survivors with control over their involvement and ensuring their privacy is protected.

SART Overview

Mission

The Fort Bend County Sexual Assault Response Team is comprised of representatives from Fort Bend County Women's Center, Fort Bend County Sheriff's Office, Sugar Land Police Department, Rosenberg Police Department, Richmond Police Department, Fort Bend County District Attorney's Office, Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners, Memorial Hermann Health System, Houston Methodist Hospital System, and Fort Bend County Mental Health Division. The mission of the Fort Bend County Sexual Assault Response Team (FBCSART) is to work collaboratively to ensure a victim-centered, trauma-informed response to adult sexual assaults, increase victim and community safety, and hold offenders accountable.

To minimize the revictimization of sexual assault victims through the investigation, assessment, intervention and prosecution processes, the Fort Bend SART has committed to the following:

To maintain a cooperative team approach to facilitate successful outcomes in the criminal justice systems through shared fact-finding and strong, collaborative case development;

To serve as a local and regional resource for information and education on sexual assault issues;

To review and modify the established protocols as deemed necessary by the SART to ensure compliance with all state and federal laws as well as recognized best practices within the field, or upon a change of authorized partner signatories;

That all State and Federal confidentiality laws will be followed in connection with this agreement.

Values

I. VICTIM-CENTERED APPROACH

A. This approach is defined as the systematic focus on the needs of the victim and accounts for the victim's history, experience, and perspective, as well as the impact of the criminal justice process on them and their family and community. In a victim-centered approach, the victim's wishes, safety, and well-being are taken into strong consideration in all matters and procedures.

B. A victim-centered approach seeks to minimize re-traumatization associated with the criminal justice process by providing the support of advocates and service providers, empowering victims as engaged participants in the criminal justice process, and providing victims an opportunity to play a role in seeing justice served.

C. This approach is one of the most important aspects of the collaboration that arises from SARTs: the knowledge that we gain from a collaborative response to sexual assault in our community promotes trust among partners and seeks to keep victims at the center of our justice process.

II. TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

A. An understanding of trauma and its effects, as well as the principles of being trauma-informed, are key for service providers and criminal justice system professionals. We must understand trauma and its manifestations and approach all interactions through a trauma-informed lens.

B. Trauma-informed approach is a strengths-based framework that is responsive to the impact of trauma, emphasizing physical, psychological, and emotional safety for both SART responders and victims; and creates opportunities for victims to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.

The approach:

1. Realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery;
2. Recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in victims, families, staff, and others involved with the system;
3. Responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and
4. Seeks to actively resist re-traumatization.

III. REDUCE VICTIM-BLAMING

A. Victim blaming refers to attitudes or beliefs that hold victims partially or completely responsible for being sexually assaulted. Victim blaming typically utilizes the argument that if the victim had not made a particular choice, engaged in a particular activity, or acted in a particular way, this person would not have been assaulted. Victims usually engage in this type of second guessing and hearing any variation of this theme from others adds to the trauma already being experienced.

B. Through collaborative response and cross-agency training, the SART seeks to ensure that the blame for the crime remains set on those who perpetrated the crime.

IV. TEAM BUILDING BETWEEN AGENCIES

A. The relationships that we build with each other as members of the SART are essential to achieve positive outcomes in sexual assault cases. Collaborative response provides a systematic response that allows victims to feel supported, informed and involved. It is essential that this team make time to build and strengthen relationships and address issues that arise through a multi-disciplinary approach of its members, with the best interest of victims in mind. We must also search for ways to increase collaboration between the partners.

V. STANDARDS AND TRAINING

A. SART Committee will ensure the policies and effort it puts forth promote best practices and effective intervention to address sexual assault in the county. To do this, the SART Committee will meet on at least a quarterly basis to ensure that SART protocols are evolving and remain trauma-informed.

B. Members of the SART Committee will commit to attending and providing cross training opportunities between all partner agencies annually. Members also commit to respond to requests for cross training.

C. This Protocol will be reviewed and updated annually by the SART Committee. As part of the implementation process, there is a commitment by all partners to provide training to their agencies on the Protocol and all updates thereafter.

D. The SART Committee will plan and implement effective prevention strategies and collaborate with other agencies, including educational institutions, to address sexual assault in the County. Areas of focus may include sexual assault perpetrated by strangers or persons known to the victim, predatory date rape, and drug-facilitated sexual assault.

Outline of Activities and Trainings

The SART team meets regularly, typically on a quarterly basis, bringing together professionals from varying fields. These meetings serve as a platform for collaboration and creation of the SART Protocol and information sharing. SART members drafted a protocol, incorporating best practices and trauma-informed approaches. This process took many meetings and drafts to ensure that the protocol reflects the expertise and perspectives of all involved disciplines. Ongoing feedback from all SART members was collected, and the protocol was guided by all experiences and up-to-date practices. The finalized protocol was approved by the SART team and then distributed to all team members and participating agencies.

Members of the SART team attended a variety of cross- training regarding sexual assault. These trainings included: different sessions at the Crimes Against Women Conference, Addressing the Sexual Health of Patients Who Have Experienced Sexual Violence, Psychosocial Health Factors Among Men Reporting Recent Sexual Assault, You Can't Report What You Don't Remember Drug Facilitated Sexual Assault (DFSA): Providing Tools for Survivors, Sexual Violence in the Metaverse: A Call for Policy Action, and How Being Trauma Informed Improves Criminal Justice Response.

In addition to the trainings that were attended by SART team members, several members of the SART participated in giving trainings to law enforcement and members of the community to better inform them of the obstacles in sexual assault cases and Fort Bend County's efforts to overcome those obstacles and hold offenders accountable.

In conjunction with the trainings given, a Law Enforcement Pocket Guide was developed to improve initial law enforcement response to sexual assault cases. The Pocket Guide incorporates trauma- informed practices in investigative procedures, victim interviews, support mechanisms, and evidence collection and preservation.

Pocket Guide for Police Responding to Adult Sexual Assault Cases

POCKET GUIDE FOR POLICE RESPONDING TO ADULT SEXUAL ASSAULT CASE

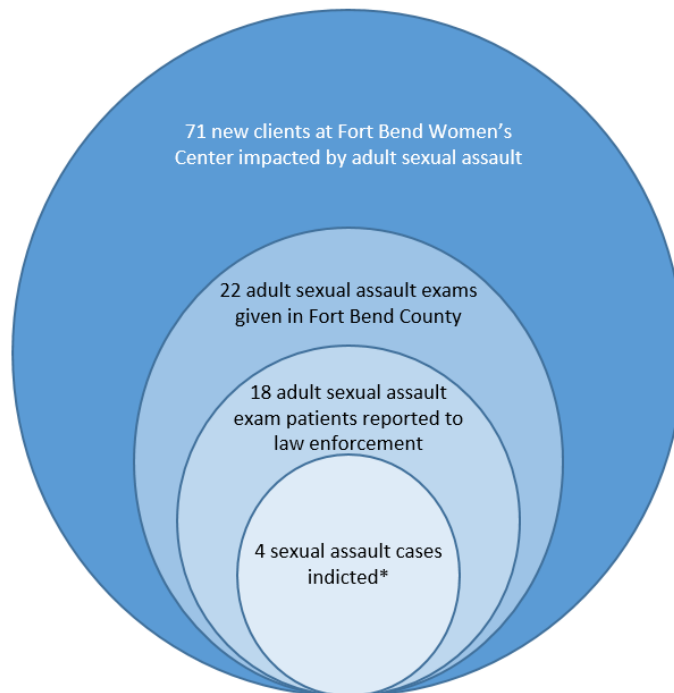
INFORMATION FROM THE COMPLAINANT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not ask the complainant if he/she/they wants to press charges Do not interview a complainant who is intoxicated or appears to be under the influence Determine how the complainant met the suspect Determine where/ when the suspect and complainant first interacted and the location of the assault Determine if and how the complainant and suspect communicated with one another – consider sending preservation letters Adult Forensic Interviews by trained forensic interviewers are available through TXFNE and it is not necessary to immediately interview and obtain all details from the complainant Remember that the complainant just experienced a traumatic event - he/she/they may not be able to immediately recount all details and may feel embarrassed or overwhelmed discussing it
DOCUMENT THE CRIME SCENE AND SPEAK TO ANY POTENTIAL WITNESSES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on information obtained from the complainant, photograph the scene if relevant to the offense, or go to the scene if feasible and obtain photographs - there might be cameras in the vicinity or cameras in the home to collect as evidence even if they didn't capture the assault Follow proper agency protocol for tagging evidence, if applicable Gather the information and speak to any potential witness. This includes anyone the complainant spoke to about the sexual assault, anyone who saw the suspect interacting with the complainant before or immediately after the assault (i.e. bartenders/bar surveillance, friends, motel surveillance) Photograph any visible injuries on the complainant
IF WITHIN 120 HOURS OF LAST ENCOUNTER, IMMEDIATELY SCHEDULE A SEXUAL ASSAULT FORENSIC EXAM (SAFE*) *also called a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) exam. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If SAFE/SANE is to be sought immediately, make sure to advise the complainant to not shower, brush teeth, or change clothes – it is not necessary for the complainant to change underwear - the forensic examiner will likely collect any underwear that the complainant is wearing SAFE/SANE exams can also aid in cases of digital penetration or attempted sexual assault SEE ATTACHED FOR LOCATIONS TO OBTAIN A SEXUAL ASSAULT EXAM
OBTAIN A PSEUDONYM FOR THE COMPLAINANT TO BE USED IN YOUR REPORT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pseudonyms protect the victim's identity for their safety and privacy. Add complainant's DOB to the form. https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/crime-victims/services-crime-victims/pseudonym-forms-crime-victims
OTHER TIPS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If suspect is on scene, keep separate from victim and other witnesses Collect the Suspect's buccal if they consent Suspects can also be forensically examined and swabbed with consent or a search warrant – the suspect's genitals may also have evidence Officers may arrest persons who the peace officer has probable cause to believe have committed an offense involving family violence (See CCP 14.03 (a)(4)) Determine if the suspect had any communication via cell phone with the victim. If so, get consent and passcodes from the victim or if necessary, a search warrant for cell extraction from the suspect DO NOT notify the suspect of the investigation if he/she is not on scene. The case detective should make decisions about when the suspect will be approached Obtain a good second contact for the complainant Contact the Fort Bend District Attorney's Office Adult Sex Crimes Prosecutor, Kaitlin Kaufmann, at 832-278-9849 with any questions, especially if you will be arresting and charging the suspect immediately

Data and Findings

Due to the time that it took to develop the SART protocol, along with the changes that SART members had to make to capture the necessary data, we were only able to gather data from the majority of SART members for the 3rd quarter of 2023. Additionally, not all agencies provided comprehensive data for analysis. This incomplete data submission posed a challenge in obtaining a holistic understanding of the sexual assault response. All members are committed to capturing data for the fourth quarter of 2023 and going forward, so that subsequent reports contain more illustrative and informative data.

One of the key findings of the data analysis is that the diminishing participation of survivors in the justice process occurs significantly before law enforcement becomes actively involved. The data indicates that a majority of sexual assault victims don't seek out a SANE exam. This highlights that there are a significant number of sexual assaults that are delayed reported or not reported at all to law enforcement. This underscores the urgent need for a more proactive approach in addressing the stigma and fear in reporting sexual assault.

SART QUARTERLY DATA – Q3 – Fort Bend County



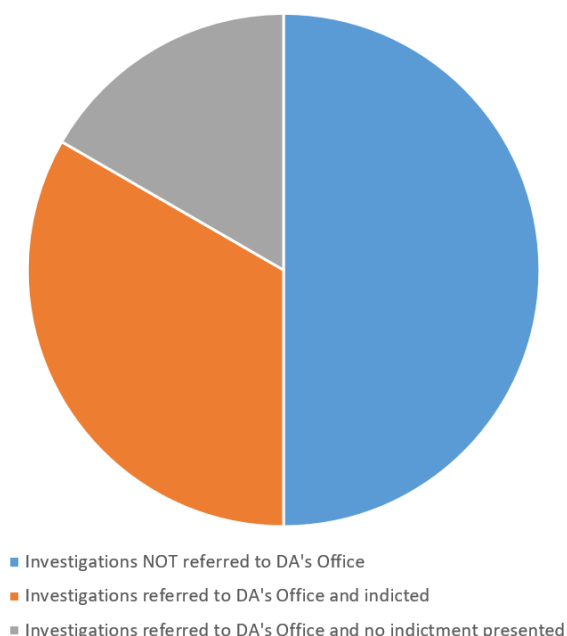
*The Adult Sexual Assault Prosecutor was out on leave for the majority of Q3 2023, so not as many cases were able to be reviewed and presented to grand jury as normally would be

Of the adult sexual assault exams given, a large majority of patients chose to report the sexual assault to law enforcement agencies. The only law enforcement agency data received by the SART was Sugar Land Police Department.

Local Law Enforcement Data:

The only law enforcement agency that was able to implement data collection and provide data was Sugar Land Police Department which received a total of 6 sexual assault reports and conducted 6 sexual assault investigations as a result of those reports in the Second quarter of 2023 (April through June). Sugar Land Police Department was able to provide data prior to the third quarter of 2023 and that is more illustrative than solely looking at third quarter of 2023 information because none of the third quarter cases have been turned into the District Attorney's Office for review at this point.

Q2 2023 Sugar Land PD Investigations



Of the six investigations, three were not referred to the District Attorney's office – one of the cases was still an ongoing investigation that could later be turned into the District Attorney's Office, one of the cases was determined to be unfounded by the investigator, and the third case was an inactive investigation. Of the three cases that were referred to the District Attorney's Office, two were indicted, and the third case remains under review by the District Attorney's Office.

One insight gained from the data is the need for the SART team to emphasize to law enforcement the importance of continuing investigations even if a victim expresses hesitancy or explicitly states that they do not want to press charges. The data indicates that victims may initially be reluctant to pursue legal action, however, emphasizing to law enforcement the potential for victims to change their minds over time, especially as the case moves through the process, is crucial. Additionally, the data from the Fort Bend Women's Center confirms the substantial underreporting of adult sexual assaults to law enforcement, which highlights the need to work with victim advocacy organizations to ensure that survivors are provided with ongoing support and resources, even if they initially choose not to engage with law enforcement. This support can be pivotal in empowering survivors to make informed decisions about their involvement in the criminal justice process.

Fort Bend County Adult Sexual Assault Response Team Protocol

Agency Commitments:

1. The role of the **Fort Bend County District Attorney's Office (DA's office)** is to file appropriate criminal charges and to seek justice. Charging decisions shall be based upon the professional judgment of the District Attorney's Office.

The DA's Office commits to:

- i. Designate a liaison to serve as a resource person for the SART and MDT meetings.
- ii. Routinely share information among team members and provide information about case status as needed and as allowed by law.
- iii. Establish and maintain contact with victims of cases filed with the district attorney's office within 60 days of receiving a case and on a regular basis every 60 days unless the victim indicates otherwise
- iv. Communicate significant court dates and case updates to victims
- v. Maintain appropriate communication and contact for the follow-up of disposition of cases.
- vi. Provide reasonable notification of upcoming trial(s) to all witnesses who will be testifying in court and arrange to meet in person prior to testimony.
- vii. Participate in SART and community training activities as determined by the SART.
- viii. Collaborate with advocacy organizations and crime victim liaisons to meet client needs regarding crime victim's rights, compensation, and services throughout prosecution.
- ix. Support Law Enforcement efforts by providing a point of contact to review search warrants and aid in investigations and provide feedback to law enforcement investigations that are filed with the District Attorney's office.
- x. Maintain and share statistics on the disposition of filed cases that the District Attorney's office receives from law enforcement
- xi. Provide ongoing process improvement information to the SART.

2. The roles of **Fort Bend County Women's Center** are to aid survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault and their children to achieve safety and self-sufficiency.

a. Fort Bend County Women's Center commits to:

- i. Designate a liaison to serve as a resource person for the SART and MDT meetings.
- ii. Routinely share information among team members and provide information about case status as needed and as allowed by law.
- iii. Participate in SART and community training activities as determined by the SART.

- iv. Collaborate with other members of the SART to meet client needs regarding crime victim's rights and advocacy throughout the criminal justice process.
 - v. Participate in system where Forensic Nurses (SANE) from partnering healthcare facilities call FBWC's 24-hour hotline to request a member of FBWC's Hospital Accompaniment Response Team (HART).
 - vi. Demonstrate a 60-minute response time from time call received to time advocate arrives at the emergency department.
 - vii. Provide hotline sexual assault victims with SAFE Ready designated healthcare facility choices for medical assessment and forensic examination when requested.
 - viii. Provide information, emotional support and crisis intervention for sexual assault victims and their family members, and/or friends at the hospital.
 - ix. Provide appropriate referrals and follow up care.
 - x. Ensure that victims are able to receive counseling resources and are not turned away.
 - xi. Provide follow-up intervention, counseling and advocacy services for victims and family members as requested.
 - xii. Provide ongoing process improvement information to the SART.
3. The role of **Participating Law Enforcement Agencies** is, in their respective jurisdictions, to investigate reports of sexual assault. The decisions concerning the arrest of a perpetrator shall be based upon law and current department policy.
- Participating Law Enforcement Agencies commit to:
- i. Designate a liaison to serve as a resource person for the SART and MDT meetings.
 - ii. Routinely share information among team members and provide information about case status as needed and as allowed by law.
 - iii. Interview and Interaction with Victims
 - 1. The responding officer to a call of sexual assault should conduct the initial interview of the victim using a trauma-informed approach to gather information that is immediately necessary to determine evidence to collect, the identity of the perpetrator or possibly witnesses
 - 2. All interviews of the victim should be recorded when possible in accordance with department policies
 - 3. In accordance with Texas Code of Criminal Procedure Art. 58.152, victims should be offered the use of a pseudonym as early as practicable in the investigation and officer(s) should complete the appropriate form
 - 4. The investigating officer or detective should conduct any follow up interviews using a trauma-informed approach and should fully understand and consider using the process of available Adult Forensic Interviews
 - 5. Request SANE exam
 - 6. Ensure that while the case is being investigated that victims receive communication on the status of the case once every 60 days unless the victim indicates otherwise up until the case is filed with the Fort Bend District Attorney's Office.

- iv. Receive forensic evidence that has been collected from the patient and/or suspect for approved forensic exams and ensure timely submission to the laboratory for forensic testing.
 - v. Participate in SART and community training activities as determined by the SART.
 - vi. Provide training to patrol officers and detectives responding to sexual assaults on evidence collection and trauma-informed approach and establish policies to be implemented in responding to sexual assault calls and investigations.
 - 1. Maintain current list of SAFE-ready facilities that is available to all officers responding to sexual assault
 - 2. Ensure that the proper law enforcement referral for a SANE exam is completed in any investigation where a victim is eligible for a SANE exam and the victim is informed on where a SANE exam can be completed
 - 3. Provide training on evidence collection specific to sexual assault cases
 - vii. Collaborate with advocacy to meet client needs regarding crime victim's rights, compensation and advocacy throughout investigation and prosecution.
 - viii. Provide ongoing process improvement information to the SART.
 - ix. File investigations with the District Attorney's Office in a timely manner with all evidence, including body camera recordings, audio recordings, SANE records, and victim contact information.
 - x. Maintain and share statistics on the number of cases reported to law enforcement and the number of those cases that involve drug-facilitated sexual assault, the incidence of predatory date rape, and sex trafficking.
4. The role of **Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE)** and physicians with specialized training serve a critical function in the response and care of adult victims of sexual assault. These healthcare providers understand how trauma impacts individuals and respect the value of empowerment and choice as vital to recovery in the aftermath of sexual assault. Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners: The Forensic Center of Excellence, Memorial Hermann Hospital System, Forensic Nursing Program, and Houston Methodist Hospital respond to adult victims of sexual violence within Fort Bend County and are committed to providing high quality care and forensic evidence preservation while working with partner agencies to ensure the best interests of the victims. This is accomplished through the direct services provided by the **Forensic Nursing** teams:

Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners commit to:

- 1. Designate a liaison to serve as a resource person for the SART and MDT meetings.
- 2. Provide medical forensic exams to victims that experience sexual assault, domestic violence, trafficking, and child and elder abuse.
- 3. Collaborate with hospitals in Fort Bend County to provide contracted forensic nursing services 24 hours a day, with an arrival time average of 90 minutes.
- 4. Provide acute and non-acute exams of victims of sexual and physical violence (TXFNE protocol - 7 days).
 - a. Acute exam - medical forensic exam completed, evidence is collected within 120 hours of incident

- b. Non-acute - medical forensic exam completed, evidence is not collected
- 5. Conduct evidence collection when appropriate and with best practice standards.
- 6. Forensic photography will be conducted for all consenting patients that have a medical forensic exam and will be secured and stored in a HIPAA compliant manner.
- 7. Provide testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections and referral for chronic infections.
- 8. Patients needing medical forensic exams will have their exam conducted in their preferred language and with culturally specific considerations.
- 9. Patients will be identified utilizing their preferred pronouns and identities.
- 10. Provide medical records to law enforcement and the District Attorney's Office within two weeks of subpoena request.
- 11. Allow nurses to meet with the District Attorney's Office for pretrial conference meetings, ensure nurses maintain contact with the District Attorney's Office when a case is pending or in process for hearings or trial, and notify the District Attorney's Office of address and/or telephone number changes of any of the nurses.
- 12. Provide SANE education and precepting of SANE candidates and ensure all nurses maintain a high level of competency through ongoing education and case reviews that will apply to their certification renewal.
- 13. Agree to meet with the nursing team to discuss quality of care, peer and procedural review and provide ongoing process improvement information to the SART.
- 14. Maintain the availability of an Adult SANE specialist to provide adult medical forensic assessments at the following locations 24/7 with an average response time of 90 minutes:
 - a. Oak Bend: Williams Way
 - b. Oak Bend: Jackson Street
 - c. CHI St. Luke's Hospital

Memorial Hermann Forensic Nursing Services commit to:

- 1. Provide a trauma informed care response to adult sexual assault patients presenting at the SAFE ready designated Memorial Hermann Acute Care Hospitals that serve Fort Bend County
 - a. Memorial Hermann Southwest Hospital
 - b. Memorial Hermann Sugar Land Hospital
 - c. Memorial Hermann Katy Hospital
- 2. Provide 24/7 availability of SANEs to conduct medical/forensic assessments with evidence collection for sexual assault patients respecting all diverse and cultural needs.
- 3. Prioritize the physical and psychological well-being of patients who have experienced sexual assault by providing a safe and non-judgmental environment with an ongoing

opportunity for informed consent throughout the medical/forensic comprehensive assessment, detailed injury documentation, and evidence preservation.

4. Encourage sexual assault patients to connect with available community advocates in a private space prior to conducting medical/forensic assessments while also respecting the patient's informed decision.
5. Memorial Hermann Healthcare providers assess the sexual assault patient for STI prophylaxis, HIV prophylaxis and Emergency Contraception according to CDC recommendations.
6. Educate on follow up, referral options, and complete a safe discharge plan for sexual assault patients to foster positive patient health outcomes.
7. Inform patients of Crime Victims Compensation sexual assault benefits.
8. Provide an exceptional individualized patient experience with evidence based quality care to the sexual assault patients.
9. Ensure high reliability with the identification, collection, documentation and preservation of evidence integrity.
10. Participate with the legal system by providing required trial testimony, adhering to institutional policy and procedures.
11. Collaborate with Fort Bend County SART stakeholders for a trauma informed, compassionate, and victim- centered approach supporting healthy and safe communities.

Houston Methodist Forensic Nursing Services commits to:

1. Provide trauma informed, patient centered care to victims of sexual and physical violence presenting at the SAFE ready designated hospitals serving Fort Bend County:
 - a. Houston Methodist Sugar Land Hospital
 - b. Houston Methodist West Hospital.
2. Provide 24/7 availability of certified Forensic Nurses to conduct medical/forensic evaluations with evidence collection (if indicated) for sexual assault, domestic violence, strangulation, human trafficking, and elder abuse patients.
3. Provide patients with a full medical, and if indicated, psychiatric evaluation, by a board-certified Emergency Medical provider prior to conducting a medical/forensic exam.
4. Respect all diverse and cultural needs of this special patient population, providing translation services by trauma informed licensed language specialists.
5. Prioritize the physical and psychological well-being of patients who have experienced sexual and/or physical assault by providing a safe and non-judgmental environment with an ongoing opportunity for informed consent throughout the comprehensive medical/forensic assessment, detailed injury documentation, and evidence preservation.
6. Provide advocacy services for patients who have endured sexual assault, domestic violence, and human trafficking in a safe and confidential manner prior to conducting a medical/forensic examination while also respecting the patient's informed decision.

7. Houston Methodist Healthcare providers will assess the sexual assault patient for STI prophylaxis, HIV prophylaxis, Hepatitis status, and emergency contraception according to CDC guidelines, and perform any STI testing that may be indicated.
8. Inform patients of Crime Victims Compensation sexual assault benefits and advocacy resources.
9. Provide an exceptional individualized patient experience with evidence-based quality care to the sexual assault, domestic violence, human trafficking, and elder abuse patients.
10. Provide reliability with injury identification, evidence collection, injury documentation, forensic photography, and preservation of evidence integrity through chain of custody.
11. Educate patients on follow up, referral options, and complete a safe discharge plan for sexual assault, domestic violence, and human trafficking patients to ensure positive patient health outcomes.
12. Join with the criminal justice system by ensuring required forensic nurse trial testimony, adhering to institutional policy and procedures.
13. Dedicate a representative from Houston Methodist to serve as a resource liaison for the Fort Bend County SART.
14. Collaborate with Fort Bend County SART participants for a trauma informed, compassionate, and patient-centered approach supporting healthy and safe communities.

5. The role of **TXFNE: The Forensic Center of Excellence, Adult Forensic Interviewers** are committed to working with the partners to ensure that interviews are trauma-informed, maintain neutrality, and assist with the investigation, so ultimately the needs of the partner, cases and the victim are met.

- i. Designate a liaison to serve as a resource person for the SART and MDT meetings.
- ii. Provide trauma-informed forensic interviews for victims of violence 19 and older.
- iii. Law enforcement and DA partners have access to schedule adult forensic interviews via telephone, email, or visiting TXFNE's website.
- iv. Adult forensic interviews are conducted in a safe trauma-informed manner by staff with a background in victim services.
- v. Interviews will be viewed by the Investigative Team via closed circuit television, secure live link, or audibly through cellphone through the interview's entirety.
- vi. Written consent must be obtained from the victim before the forensic interview. The victim may withdraw consent at any time during the interview and if consent is withdrawn the interview must stop.
- vii. Interviews will be stored within the Intelligent Video Solution (IVS) and within a backup system to ensure interview storage safety and security.
- viii. Interviews will be available to investigative partners immediately.
- ix. Tele-forensic interviews are available for victims who have relocated out of the county.
- x. Host a monthly MDT for Fort Bend County cases.

6. The role of **Fort Bend County Behavioral Health Services** is to provide resources and training related to the behavioral health of victims and witnesses that are involved in sexual assault investigations and case
 - i. Designate a liaison to serve as a resource for the SART and MDT meetings as necessary.
 - ii. Provide training and education on trauma-informed approaches within the criminal justice system
 - iii. Collaborate with members of the SART and MDT as a mental-health expert and resource
 - iv. Provide ongoing process improvement information to the SART.

Data Gathering and Evaluation Commitment

To close gaps and decrease attrition of Sexual Assault cases through the Fort Bend criminal justice system, members of the SART will work collaboratively to gather information on the prevalence of sexual assault (SANE exam providers, Advocacy Organizations, Law Enforcement), the number of incidents reported to law enforcement, reports then referred for prosecution and the disposition of cases handled by the District Attorney's office to identify gaps that may be contributing to attrition and analyze current policies that may be negatively impacting the county-wide response to sexual assault. Each agency will be responsible for monthly reporting as follows:

Law Enforcement Agencies:

- Any case involving sex trafficking
- All cases involving drug facilitated sexual assault (DFSA)
- Cases involving family violence adult sexual assault (dating relationship or married)
- Number of adult sexual assault reports taken
- Number of adult delayed sexual assault reports taken (reported more than 120 hours after the assault)
- Number of adult sexual assault cases filed with the FBCDAO
- Number of adult cases referred for a SANE exam
- Number of cases scheduled for an AFI

Fort Bend County District Attorney's Office:

- Any case involving sex trafficking
- All cases involving drug facilitated sexual assault (DFSA)
- Cases involving family violence sexual assault
- Number of adult sexual assault cases received, by LE agency
- Number of adult sexual assault cases filed
- Number of adult sexual assault cases indicted
- Number of adult sexual assault cases no billed
- Number of adult sexual assault cases declined

Women's Center Agencies:

- Any case involving sex trafficking

- Cases involving family violence adult sexual assault
- Number of new clients impacted by adult sexual assault
- Number of new clients impacted by adult sexual assault that reported to law enforcement
- Number of new clients impacted by adult sexual assault that **HAVE NOT** reported to law enforcement
- Number of adult clients accompanied during the medical forensic exam

Forensic Nursing Agencies:

- Any case involving sex trafficking
- All cases involving adult drug-facilitated sexual assault (DFSA)
- Cases involving family violence adult sexual assault
- Number of adult sexual assault exams conducted
- Number of adult sexual assault patients that reported to law enforcement
- Number of adult sexual assault patients that **HAVE NOT** reported to law enforcement
- Number of adult sexual assault patients accepting advocacy accompaniment and advocate agency response
- Average response time for FNE arrival

The Forensic Center (AFI):

- Any case involving sex trafficking
- All cases involving drug-facilitated adult sexual assault (DFSA)
- Cases involving family violence adult sexual assault
- Number of AFIs conducted
- Number of AFIs conducted, by agency

Information gathered from quarterly reporting will be reviewed within the SART.

Case Reviews

The SART commits to a biennial evaluation through sexual assault case reviews of the effectiveness of individual agency and interagency protocols and systems.

Training Commitment

All members of the SART team commit to attending at least four hours of annual cross-agency training on the dynamics of sexual assault for response team members participating in the quarterly meetings as required by Section 351.254(c)

Conflict Resolution

It is important for SART team members to be respectful and mindful of each other. Every SART member has a specific role and responsibility which may appear to be in conflict with those of another team

member. Be aware that each team member is trying to juggle meeting the needs of their own agency, the community, and the victim. Creating a safe environment where each team member can effectively communicate and solve problems is important for a victim centered response. The team must consistently ask themselves, "What is in the best interest of the victim?" Members will work to understand and consider the roles, responsibilities and limitations of other team members through meetings and networking.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality of victim and survivor information will be preserved and each individual agency will be responsible to maintain confidentiality of the victims they serve. As information is shared among Fort Bend County SART members and affiliates confidentiality will be maintained as required by law.

Evaluation of Protocols: Case Review

The completion of a comprehensive case review is a crucial step in the ongoing evaluation and refinement of sexual assault response protocols. However, in this instance, the SART team encountered challenges that impeded the timely execution of a case review. Two primary factors contributed to this delay: the extensive time required for protocol development and the inability to secure consent from a survivor within the allotted timeframe. The primary reason for the delay in conducting a case review stems from the significant amount of time dedicated to the development of a thorough and effective protocol. Writing a protocol that encompassed all perspectives of the SART team, while also ensuring it aligned with best practices and trauma-informed approaches was a time-intensive process. The team prioritized the development of a robust protocol to provide a solid foundation for the SART's operations, inadvertently extending the timeline for other activities such as case reviews.

Going forward, all SART members will meet and collaborate to select a case for a comprehensive case review before the next biennial report. We will come to an agreement on what type of case to select. Ideally, the case review would be a survivor who has reported the sexual assault to police, the case has been referred to the District Attorney's Office and also sought assistance from the Women's Center, so that a variety of aspects of the criminal justice system can be discussed and evaluated. We will establish a framework to discuss case reviews, and most importantly we will get informed consent of the survivor that is subject of the case review and maintain their confidentiality. If the SART team chooses to evaluate a case that has been disposed of, the District Attorney's Office or the Women's Center would likely be the last agency to have contact with the survivor, so it would make sense for them to reach out and get informed consent, explain why their case would be beneficial for review, the purpose of the review, and the parties that will participate and access the review. The SART team will also make sure that all privacy requirements of the various SART team agencies are considered and followed.

Conclusion

The Fort Bend County Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) has taken significant steps in our commitment to victim-centered, multidisciplinary collaboration. We have established a comprehensive SART Protocol, conducted successful and regular interagency meetings, implemented improved practices, created a specialized law enforcement pocket guide, attended cross-training on sexual assault, and started collecting comprehensive data, particularly from all forensic nursing providers in Fort Bend County.

The development of a unified protocol has been a cornerstone achievement, fostering a shared understanding and approach among team members from diverse disciplines. The regular meetings have served as a platform for collaboration, providing an avenue for communication, knowledge exchange, and improvement toward a more victim-centered response to sexual assault cases. We have taken steps toward comprehensive data collection, particularly with the active participation of all forensic nursing providers in Fort Bend County, allowing us to start evaluating the causes and correlations of where victim attrition occurs in the process.

However, it is also important to acknowledge areas that require improvement. Data collection needs to be expanded and we need to ensure all agencies collect and provide data to ensure uniformity and completeness across all participating entities. Going forward, we will have the time and ability to focus on ensuring that we complete a case review.

As we move forward, the Fort Bend County SART remains dedicated to the ongoing enhancement of our response capabilities. Building on our accomplishments, we commit to refining data collection methods, streamlining case review processes, and maintaining victim-centered best practices. By continually improving and adapting to the evolving landscape of sexual assault response, we remain steadfast in our mission to provide unwavering support to survivors and work collaboratively towards a safer and more just community.