

# On Your SIDE

For victims of sex crime, Salina provides support and a new law provides more options

BY JOHN BERGGREN



SANE/SART co-coordinators Karen Groot and Susan Reinert

The sobering statistics are that one in every three to four women and one in every six men will be victims of sexual assault during their lifetime. But, only 12 percent of these crimes are ever reported to authorities.

Salina Regional's Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner/Sexual Assault Response Team (SANE/SART) provides 24/7 sexual assault care to 29 counties in north central and northwestern Kansas. Many victims are referred by area law enforcement agencies, but Kansas law now allows adult victims to seek SANE/SART care without notifying the police.

"Many victims don't feel comfortable reporting to law enforcement because they fear doing so could put them at an even greater risk," says Karen Groot, R.N., SANE-A, SANE-P. "We can collect evidence that is anonymously held by the Kansas Bureau of Investigation for up to five years should victims later decide to file charges for a crime."

## EVIDENCE COLLECTION WITH A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Groot and co-coordinator Susan Reinert, R.N., SANE-A, SANE-P, are accredited by the International Association of Forensic Nurses for evidence collection on adult, adolescent and pediatric patients making them two of only 217 nurses in the world who carry the pediatric accreditation. Upon admission to the service, pictures are taken with a high resolution Secure Digital Forensic Imaging camera for identification purposes and to document any injuries present. Swab samples and hair samples are collected for possible DNA evidence.

Throughout the entire examination, nurses offer counseling, reassurances, support and information to assist the healing process. They provide medications and referrals for follow-up care and work closely with patient advocate agencies like the Domestic Violence Association of Central Kansas and Child and Parenting Services to make sure the psychological and social needs of patients are met.

"While the body is our crime scene and we have a very important job to do, both Susan and I feel like this job is a calling or a ministry in a way," Groot says. "The nature of this job can be very hard on you, but helping these patients during such a troubling time in their lives is critical."

Sexual assault victims who don't seek SANE/SART and patient advocate agency support are much more likely to suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder, excessive alcohol or drug use and suffer from other illnesses.

"People who are victimized and don't receive help tend to become victims again and again because they make bad choices in life again and again," Reinert says.

## COURT TESTIMONY PROVES VITAL

In 2009 Salina Regional's SANE/SART nurses provided 211 consultations, 90 forensic exams and testimony in 47 active court cases. Many times DNA evidence collected as a result of a forensic examination and testimony provided are critical for conviction.

"In cases where one side says nothing happened or one claims consent, then having DNA evidence or physical evidence contrary to consent can be damaging to a defense," says Tom Drees, Ellis County Attorney in Hays. "In today's world juries expect to see forensic and physical evidence if they're going to give a conviction. Having a trained, qualified person able to testify to this type of evidence adds a lot of value towards these types of cases." ❏

## PRESERVING EVIDENCE

Salina Regional's SANE/SART program will collect evidence up to five days or 120 hours after an assault, but the sooner exams are conducted the more likely forensic evidence can be found. These tips should be followed to the best of one's ability to help preserve as much evidence as possible:

- + Do not drink any liquids.
- + Do not brush your teeth or use mouthwash.
- + Do not take a shower or bath.
- + Do not douche.
- + Do not change clothes.
- + Do not urinate or have a bowel movement.
- + Bring any other items related to the assault with you or turn them over to law enforcement.

## HOW TO REACH US

SANE/SART Unit phone: **785-452-7095**

Salina Regional Emergency Department  
phone: **785-452-7095**

