

Advocate South Suburban Hospital, Hazel Crest

By Megan McCann

SANE Nurse Program Advocate South Suburban Hospital



The emergency department at Advocate South Suburban Hospital is one of the only emergency departments in Cook County staffed 24 hours-a-day with certified sexual assault nurse examiners (SANE).

Nurses with the SANE certification provide care, gather forensic evidence, counsel the victim, and testify in court. “The way a victim is treated after an assault can make a huge difference in how he/she heals,” said the hospital’s SANE coordinator Nancy Healy. In a traditional emergency department, nurses are often overwhelmed by the large number of patients and are not trained to properly collect evidence. This can result in the perpetrator not being prosecuted.

A special treatment room at Advocate South Suburban Hospital is dedicated for the care of sexual assault victims. It is equipped with state-of-the-art equipment used for patient comfort and advanced evidence collection. A vital piece of equipment is the colposcope, which provides high quality magnified images of injuries. Prosecutors recently used images of a victim’s injuries taken by the hospital’s SANE team to strengthen their case against an accused perpetrator. “When the images were entered into evidence the person’s bail was raised to \$1 million overnight,” said Healy. “The photos lead to a guilty plea and prosecutors are now seeking life in prison.”

Healy is working with local advocacy groups and law enforcement to create a South Cook County Regional SANE Center. “We want to use a team approach involving law enforcement, the medical community, rape crisis advocates, and the prosecutor’s office to provide the best care to victims,” said Healy. “The program would have agencies refer victims to one hospital to ensure they are treated by a certified SANE nurse. This will aid in patient care and should positively impact prosecution of sexual assault perpetrators.” Advocate South Suburban Hospital would be the referred hospital for the South Cook County region. Healy and the other organizers hope the South Cook County project will be a pilot program for the entire county.