

Hidden Clues: A collaborative approach to non-fatal strangulation using a forensic light source and photography

Audrey Bergin, MA

abergin@lifebridgehealth.org
Manager, Domestic Violence (DOVE) Program
Northwest Hospital Center, Randallstown, MD
President, Maryland Health Care Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Rosalyn Berkowitz, RN, BSN

rberkowi@lifebridgehealth.org
Northwest Hospital Center, Randallstown, MD
Clinical Leader, DOVE Consultant

Problems with identifying strangulation victims

- Present to ED with "sore throat" or "headache"
- Present with a fractured orbital bone or other painful injury
- Use phrase like "jacked up"
- Patient tells the advocate, but not the nurse or doctor

Other problems

- Medical staff were not aware of potential severe and fatal medical outcomes
- Police charging assault as misdemeanor
- Problems in documenting both in medical record and in police report

Intersection of Lethality & Strangulation

- Prevention is promoted by predictability
- Strangulation is one of the most highly predictive lethality factors
- Maryland's Lethality Assessment Project showed 54% of victims were strangled

Strangulation Response Project

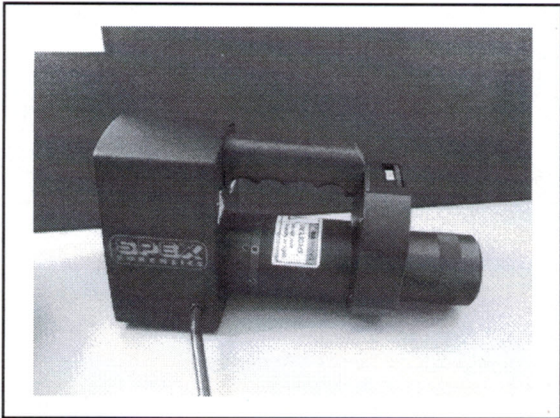
- Research, collaboration and training began with police, prosecutors and medical staff
 - Medical
 - Police
 - Prosecution
 - Statewide Efforts

Medical Response

- Victim identification and referral
- Nursing and Physician Education
- ED Strangulation Protocol
- Documentation
- EMS Training

Forensic Light Source Project

- Pilot project
- Police involved cases in Woodlawn, Pikesville and Franklin
- Examination
- Photographing in conjunction with the light source



FLS Video

How to help victims

- Strangulation can be deadly days, weeks later
- **SEEK MEDICAL TREATMENT**
- Educate victims regarding medical issues and treatment
- Criminal Injuries Compensation – can compensate medical bills

- Encourage victims to be informed health care consumers
- “Does your hospital have a protocol for how you treat non-fatal strangulation?”
- “Does your hospital do CT scans for non-fatal strangulation like NW hospital does?”
