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

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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
Police Response

- Roll call trainings
- Training in the police academy
- Laminated cards with questions
- Strangulation Supplement
Prosecution

- Education – with prosecutors, Police Academy
- Collaboration with law enforcement and advocates to charge as a felony
- Frye-Reed Hearing – Forensic Light Source
- Expert witness preparation
- Victimless prosecution

Statewide Efforts

- Lethality Assessment Project
- Legislation changes
- Using the Strangulation Response Project as a model to replicate in other counties
Forensic Light Source Project

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