

Wisconsin Compassionate Care for Rape Victims 2005-2006 Survey Highlight Report

Introduction

In 2004, 4,775 female sexual assaults were reported in Wisconsin yet it's estimated that only 36% of rape victims ever report their assault. Over 70% of the sexual assault victims were under the age of 15. Nationally, over 300,000 women are raped each year, resulting in over 25,000 unintended pregnancies and 16,000 abortions. About 22,000 (88%) of these pregnancies could be prevented if all women who were raped used emergency contraception (EC). EC is simply a high concentration of birth control pills that prevents pregnancy when taken within 120 hours of unprotected intercourse. The American Medical Association, the American College of Emergency Physicians, and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists explicitly recommend that EC should be offered to all victims if they are at risk of pregnancy.

Objective and Background

The Compassionate Care for Rape Victims Coalition (CCRV) is a diverse group of organizations dedicated to ensuring comprehensive health care for rape victims. This survey highlight report summarizes data gathered through the CCRV survey of EC in Wisconsin hospital emergency departments from December 2005 through April 2006. Any changes regarding hospitals or their EC policies as of May 15, 2006 have not been included in this report. The primary objective of the survey was to examine hospital emergency departments' policies for providing information about and dispensing EC to rape victims.

Methods

The hospitals surveyed included those with emergency departments which are acknowledged by the Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA) and the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS). The total number of hospitals included in the survey sample was 123. Hospitals without emergency departments were not included.

Each hospital's Chief Executive Officer, Director of Emergency Services, and Director of Nursing were initially mailed surveys. Those hospitals that did not respond to the initial mailing received up to three follow-up phone calls to their emergency departments asking them to respond to the survey. An 89% response rate was achieved, with a total of 109 hospitals responding to the survey.

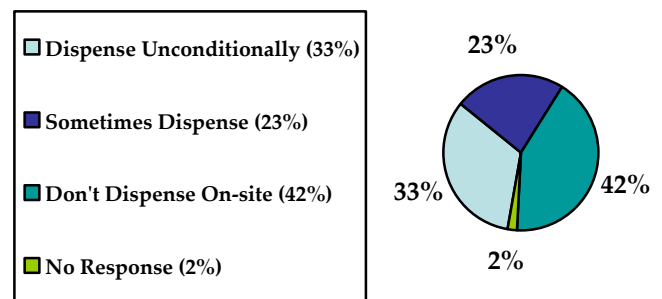
In the case where more than one survey was received from the same hospital, the more thoroughly completed survey or the one completed by a higher ranking staff was included in the analysis. Comments written in the margins of surveys were used to clarify responses and extracted for narrative reporting. Follow-up phone calls were made to allow hospitals to confirm their answers when inconsistencies were found for specific questions of interest.

Key Findings

Of the 109 hospitals that responded, 36 hospitals (33%) dispense EC unconditionally to rape victims, with an additional 25 hospitals (23%) reporting they sometimes dispense largely based on the discretion of the health care provider (14 hospitals).

Forty-six hospitals (42%) reported that it was not standard policy to dispense EC on-site. Of these hospitals, 24 reported that they refer the patient to a pharmacy with a prescription for EC.

EC DISPENSING POLICY IN EMERGENCY ROOMS



Two of the hospitals that submitted a survey did not respond to the specific questions related to dispensing EC to rape victims.

Protocols

Currently, outside of Wisconsin statute 448.30 which requires physicians to fully inform patients of all their treatments, the American Medical Association has established guidelines that require counseling and the provision of EC to rape victims.

Referrals for Counseling

Eighty-one hospitals (74%) reported providing referrals for follow-up counseling to all sexual assault victims, 14 hospitals (12%) reported providing referrals to most victims, and 5 hospitals (5%) reported providing referrals to some victims. Of hospitals that provide referrals, a majority reported referring victims to their local rape crisis center. The next highest percentage referred to on-site social workers or the local department of social service. Four hospitals did not provide any referrals for follow-up counseling.

Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE)

A Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) is a registered nurse (R.N.) who has advanced education and clinical preparation in forensic examination of sexual assault victims.

Thirty-three hospitals (30%) participate in the SANE program and have a SANE nurse available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to perform a comprehensive examination and assessment, collect high quality evidence and provide expert testimony in cases where the crime of sexual assault is reported. Twenty-three hospitals do not engage in the SANE program but have SANE-trained staff available.

Hospitals with a SANE program or SANE-trained staff were more likely to have a standard policy to provide information on EC (98%) compared to those without a SANE program or SANE-trained staff (52%). The hospitals with SANE programs or SANE-trained staff are also more likely to have a standard policy to dispense EC (77%) compared to those without a SANE program or SANE-trained staff (34%).

Other Significant Findings

Forty-three of the 109 hospitals (39%) that responded to the survey are considered to be religiously affiliated. The hospitals with religious affiliation were less likely to have a standard policy to dispense EC (52%) compared to hospitals without religious affiliation (59%).

Conclusions

Victims of sexual assault deserve immediate access to safe, effective methods of pregnancy prevention. From this survey we estimate that only 33% of Wisconsin hospitals are dispensing EC unconditionally to rape victims and at least 42% are not dispensing EC on-site. Another 23% do not have consistent policies, but defer to the discretion of a health care provider on duty or may refer the patient off-site. There is no evidence that the patients who are referred, however, actually receive access to EC.

This survey demonstrates that only one-third of Wisconsin Emergency Departments are consistently providing comprehensive and compassionate care to rape victims. Proposed legislation, such as the Compassionate Care for Rape Victims Bill, which seeks to ensure that all Wisconsin rape victims are informed of EC as an option to prevent an unintended pregnancy and that EC is dispensed to victims upon request, is necessary to ensure that all rape victims in Wisconsin receive the compassionate care they deserve.

For additional information regarding this survey and Compassionate Care for Rape Victims, visit:
www.wiawh.org.