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Their take: Care of sexual assault victims is a priority
Team is trained to provide compassionate care during investigation of the crime

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Guest columnist

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One in six women and one in 33 men will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime.

This startling statistic is provided by the Rape Incest National Network and is highlighted during the month of April as locally the Mayor's Commission Against Domestic Violence strives to educate the community about sexual violence.

While no one wants a loved one to become the next statistic, it should be somewhat comforting to know that Grant County continues to work cooperatively and comprehensively to address this crime of power, rage and violence.

It is in an endeavor that was started in the 1990s by members of the community to provide the highest standard of care and service to sexual assault victims.

Grant County Prosecutor Jim Luttrull Jr. first contacted me as the nursing director of the Emergency Department at Marion General Hospital and asked me if we could do better with the care and treatment rendered to victims of sexual abuse. Luttrull relayed the information he had received regarding Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners and was interested in the possibility of a more consistent approach to these cases.

Often, it seemed nurse examiners spent hours with law enforcement officers and then again in the Emergency Department. The method of collecting forensic evidence and the history of events felt like a re-victimization was occurring during the investigation.

A new higher standard of care for treatment and evidence collection for sexual assault victims was established nationally and embraced by prosecutors, law enforcement agencies and the Emergency Nurses Association. Nurses received specific training in evidence collection to better assure consistency and eventual prosecution of cases. Grant County was no exception to this standard of care and treatment.

Locally, a strong community team was put in place and consisted of membership from Marion General Hospital, the Grant County Prosecutors' office, law enforcement agencies, Family Service Society, Inc. and later chaired by a member from Indiana Wesleyan University. This team of leaders established a community-needs assessment, developed partnerships and determined financial feasibility to provide a higher standard of care.

After research and review of grant possibilities, and finding no viable options, Marion General Hospital committed to the cost of training nurses to become Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners. The determination was made that if this was the new standard of care, the hospital should aspire to provide the best quality care possible.

That was just the beginning. A Sexual Assault Response Team was formed and a Grant County protocol was established with defined roles and expectations for each member of the team. The goal was to collect the history of events and evidence in a team approach that made the victim's comfort and safety the top priority.

No longer would we have redundant questions or gather personal information in areas that lacked privacy. It became the mission of the team to provide a coordinated and compassionate community response to victims of sexual assault, to be respectful of each victim's individual needs, be uncompromising in its high standard of care and to expediently and effectively investigate the crime.

I write to let citizens of Grant County know how the leaders of your community are working for the benefit of those unfortunate to be victimized by another.

These successes are supported by the Mayor's Commission Against Domestic Violence. As you drive around the community this month, you will encounter two billboards displaying the SART team that includes representatives from the agencies involved and the SANE nurses for Marion General Hospital, who have committed to serve their community.

This is yet another sign that Marion and Grant County leadership is working to meet the needs in its community through prevention and intervention services.

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