

# PROTOCOL – SUSPECTED HUMAN TRAFFICKING

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Many survivors of human trafficking report visiting health facilities multiple times during their time in captivity. Although it is not expected, there is a chance that providers and volunteers encounter patients who are being trafficked. **Know the signs, offer support, and demonstrate compassion.** (Also see Patient Population Competency document)

## Keep in Mind

- You will not be able to solve the problem or rescue someone in the short time a patient is at the Clinic. **Resist the impulse to rescue.**
- Often the safest option for a person experiencing trafficking is to get themselves out of the situation.
- **Victims are the experts of their own situation and safety.**
- Seattle/King County Clinic’s mission is **compassionate care**. Compassion and caring by even ONE person can be a source of hope and strength, even if the trafficking or abuse is never directly addressed.
- Prioritize the patient’s primary health need or concern.
- Don’t make promises you can’t keep.
- **Avoid judgement**, or anything that may come across as judgement including voyeuristic questioning, acting shocked, sarcasm, or put-downs.
- Avoid the word “pimp.” The correct term is “the trafficker.”
- Don’t use words like “prostitute” or “illegal alien.” “Trafficked person” is the preferred term. Some people may not identify as a “victim.” “A person forced to work against their will” or other descriptions may be more effective ways of describing the person’s situation and identity.

## Red Flags

Individual signs may not indicate a person is trafficked. However, multiple signs or a feeling that “something just isn’t quite right” may indicate a more serious problem. A trafficked person often:

- Is accompanied by someone who speaks for them, refuses the person privacy, or seems controlling of the person
- Gives a scripted or inconsistent story
- Appears unaware of their surroundings including location, time, date
- Seems anxious, submissive, or hostile; may avoid eye contact
- Is reluctant to answer questions about illness or injury
- Has tattoos or branding
- Compulsively checks phone; multiple phones
- Has an inconsistent appearance (ex. appears malnourished but with multiple phones and manicured nails; clothing is inappropriate for the weather)

## If You Encounter a Person You Suspect is being Trafficked

1. Try to speak with the patient **alone**.
  - a. Explain you need to use an InDemand Interpreting machine because it covers medical terminology. Excuse any interpreter that is with the patient.
  - b. If a person accompanying the patient refuses to leave, use your position to make up a reason they need to leave:
    - i. “I need to do an exam. To respect the patient’s privacy, we ask that anyone accompanying the patient leave the room.”
    - ii. “I need to take [patient’s name] to get a mammogram or a few labs. Only patients are allowed.”
2. **Demonstrate concern and build trust**
  - a. “Are you okay?”
  - b. “Do you feel safe?”
  - c. “I’m not going to do anything you don’t want me to.” (There are some mandatory reporting laws in select circumstances, see below.)
  - d. “Do you feel that people are controlling you or forcing you to do things that you don’t want to?”
  - e. “Are there people that are dangerous to be around?”

- f. "What are some thing you do to keep yourself safe?"
  - g. "Would you know how to get help if needed?"
  - h. "Are you worried about getting help?"
3. Provide the patient with available options. **Offer and ask, don't force. Remember, they are the experts of their own safety**
- a. National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) hotline
    - i. **1-888-373-7888** (24/7, confidential, translators available)
    - ii. Offer them a chapstick tube with the national hotline number inside. Explain the hidden paper looks like a fortune from a fortune cookie so if found with it they can just say it came from a cookie. Share the "lucky numbers" are actually the hotline number disguised in a different format.
  - b. Provide a SKCC referral form for follow-up health care, encourage patient to schedule an appointment with onsite Community Health Center (whether for real concerns or just as an excuse to give the patient another chance to be in contact with a health professional).
4. While highly unlikely, if a patient should request help exiting their situation:
- a. Quietly contact your Lead or Director.
  - b. They will join you and the patient in private to call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) hotline at **1-888-373-7888** for guidance and to discuss next steps.
5. Mandatory reporting applies in the following instances that may be related to human trafficking. Contact your Lead or Director for support.
- a. Abuse, sexual assault, or neglect of a minor
  - b. Abuse, neglect, or exploitation of an elderly or disabled adult
  - c. Firearm or stabbings wounds
  - d. STIs and certain communicable diseases (managed by SKCC lab)
  - e. **All other reports require permission of the patient.**
6. If you encounter someone you suspect of being trafficked, regardless if they make an admission or ask for help:
- a. Accurately document the patient's injuries and treatment in the patient's record. Do not make any reference to your suspicions or observations around trafficking as the record will be in the patient's possession (and potentially the trafficker's possession) until they exit the Clinic, but do write down on a separate sheet of paper the patient's name, ID number (i.e. P12345) and date of birth as indicated on the label on their medical record.
  - b. Unless the patient falls under the mandatory reporting guidelines above, you must gain permission and consent from the patient before disclosing any personal information about that person to others, including service providers.
  - c. When the patient leaves, use a separate sheet of paper to document any findings or observations related to suspected human trafficking. Be careful with paraphrasing or summarizing; use patient quotes as much as possible, stick to the facts. Print and sign your name and include the date.
  - d. Contact your Lead or Director to inform them that you have had an encounter with someone you suspect of being trafficked and give them the documentation to be added to the patient's electronic record.