

County of Santa Clara  
Santa Clara Valley Health & Hospital System  
Santa Clara Valley Medical Center



106814

**DATE:** June 30, 2021

**TO:** Health and Hospital Committee

**FROM:** Paul E. Lorenz, Chief Executive Officer, SCVH

**SUBJECT:** Adult/Adolescent Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE) Program Report

**RECOMMENDED ACTION**

Receive report from Santa Clara Valley Medical Center relating to Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE) services at all SAFE response sites.

**FISCAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no fiscal implications with the receipt of this report.

**REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION**

During the Board of Supervisors meeting on June 22, 2021, the Board requested SCVMC to report to the Health and Hospital Committee on June 30, 2021 regarding the provision of sexual assault forensic exam services at all three response sites.

**CHILD IMPACT**

The recommended action will have no/no/neutral child impact.

**SENIOR IMPACT**

The recommended action will have no/neutral senior impact.

**SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

The recommended action will have no/neutral sustainability implications.

**BACKGROUND**

Pursuant to the California penal code §13823.95(b)(1) any survivor “of a sexual assault who seeks a medical evidentiary exam...shall be provided with a standardized medical evidentiary examination.” For 34 years, Santa Clara Valley Medical Center (SCVMC) has been the designated general acute facility to provide medical forensic care for survivors of sexual assault in Santa Clara County. The SCVMC adult/adolescent sexual assault forensic exam (SAFE) program consists of the qualified health care providers, who are trained following

state and federal regulatory and legal requirements and responds to survivors 12 years and older within 10 days of assault. The SCVMC SAFE Program works to ensure each qualified health care provider, usually a sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE), maintains and follows best practice standards for trauma-responsive medical forensic care. Sexual violence and assault are traumatic events that can result in a range of medical issues for the survivor, including acute and chronic mental health needs, physical injuries, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

The SCVMC adult/adolescent SAFE program works in partnership with the Pediatric SAFE program that has been historically co-located on the SCVMC campus, until it moved its primary location to the Children’s Advocacy Center at 455 O’Connor Drive, in April 2021. The Pediatric SAFE program sees survivors of child sexual abuse age 11 years and younger for acute medical evidentiary exams.

### **SAFE Program Response**

In responding to survivors of sexual assault, the SCVMC SAFE Program serves a critical dual function – to provide early trauma-responsive medical care and to secure time-sensitive evidence, including relevant history, documentation of findings, preservation of evidence, and securing digital images. A medical evidentiary or “SAFE” exam is done only with the survivor’s consent and only after the SANE has informed the survivor of their rights regarding the exam process. This is important because survivors of sexual assault retain agency to make decisions for themselves and consent or decline to any or all of the SAFE exam, through the entire process. Elements of the SAFE exam are defined in the penal code and based on best practice forensic and medical science. The SANE examiner is specialized in both, by training and experience; thereby making them best qualified to provide the medical forensic care for survivors.

SAFE exams historically were provided in the centrally located SCVMC emergency department (ED), requiring survivors to travel to a single location for medical forensic care. Based on input from survivors and community members and a desire to improve access to services in the county, additional SAFE response locations were considered. Sites were identified in the north and south county that would satisfy legal requirements and could be co-located near EDs. This proximity offers access to SAFE services 24 hours a day/7 days a week, in addition to security protection, additional medical disciplines, and support services, which replicate what is available at SCVMC. Such considerations are important to ensure survivors can have the same level of SAFE care, regardless of which facility they may present to. Each response location is different and workflows may differ as a result.

SCVMC SAFE currently responds at three (3) SAFE response locations: SCVMC main campus, Stanford Health Care (SHC) ED (in Palo Alto) and Dominican Hospital (in Santa Cruz), each of which has a different workflow. These different workflows may require changes in the way the SANE manages the elements of the SAFE exam, however, they do not eliminate any part of the SAFE care available to survivors at any SAFE response

location. This is of critical importance to the SCVMC SAFE program and SANEs that respond to survivors. As highly specialized medical providers, SANEs work under standardized protocols to ensure they can deliver the highest level of care and support for survivors.

Community and survivor feedback relating to the provision of SCVMC SAFE services at all response locations is welcome and used to mitigate any variations in service levels and inform ongoing performance improvement efforts. The SCVMC SAFE program leadership collaborates with staff and leaders at all response locations to ensure consistent delivery of care and to refine workflows and protocols to improve the level of support that is provided to survivors wherever they may present for care.

All designated SAFE exam rooms are cleaned, per hospital standards, prior to each SAFE exam. SCVMC SAFE supplies are securely stored in every response location and are immediately and easily accessible by the SAFE nurse for each exam. The SAFE Nurse will also clean the carts, equipment and surfaces with the appropriate solutions prior to performing any exam and after each exam. Cleaning in this manner is standard practice at all County response locations the SCVMC SAFE team uses to perform an exam.

Survivors who present to EDs are prioritized to private triage rooms, where they are seen for a limited initial assessment and Medical Screening Exam (MSE), by either an ED physician or SAFE nurse. If there is a medical concern identified during the MSE that is beyond the scope of the SAFE exam, the survivor is prioritized to an ED room for medical care. If no medical concern is identified during the MSE, the survivor is accompanied by the SAFE Nurse to a private exam space. By law, the survivor has a right to have a sexual assault advocate and/or a support person of their choice present. All response locations prioritize availability of a private space for the survivor.

At every SAFE exam, food and comfort items are made available to survivors. Access to bathrooms with shower facilities that are appropriately cleaned and prepared is provided for every survivor. New, soft and comfortable clothes, including shoes, are also available for survivors to keep after the exam and shower.

In developing the processes and workflow for each response location, every effort has been made to meet and/or exceed best practice and regulatory requirements for SAFE survivors. The SAFE team is proud of the collaborative relationships at each response location that have created survivor-centered, convenient SAFE services for sexual assault survivors with immediate access to emergency medical services regardless of where the survivor may present for care.

## **SCVMC SAFE Program Expansion of Services**

Beginning in 2019, the SCVMC Adult/Adolescent SAFE Program began expansion efforts to meet the increased demand for services and to build program capacity to ensure sufficient infrastructure was in place to sustain increased services.

In 2020, two additional SAFE service locations were opened, and a multi-agency pilot program was started to study the impact of medical forensic exams in cases of non-fatal strangulation (NFS). The pilot successfully met its goals, and these exams were approved as an ongoing SAFE service by the Board of Supervisors in April 2021 with the expectation that SAFE exams for NFS will be offered at all SAFE locations by December 2021.

The SCVMC SAFE Program is on track to open a fourth SAFE response at St. Louise Regional Hospital (SLRH), with a go-live target of October 2021.

By the end of 2021, in conjunction with other SART responding agencies, the SAFE program will begin beta testing a data program for the purpose of developing a regional database tracking the time and care continuum for survivors in Santa Clara County, from initial disclosure to the adjudication of a case. Updates on the development of this tracking program are provided separately at the Children, Seniors, and Families Committee.

### **SAFE Response Staffing**

Though successful in expanding the SAFE program in 2020 by adding new response locations and strangulation SAFE exams to its services, there were challenges to maintain stable staffing related to the pandemic. Efforts to recruit, train and retain examiners were challenged by limitations with trainers, training resources and training locations. This made it difficult to increase the number of on-call SAFE examiners available to cover the schedule and respond to survivors at all SAFE response locations. New positions approved in the FY2022 budget will help overcome such workforce reductions and stabilize exam staffing. Stable coverage will allow us to optimize medical forensic services for survivors of gender-based violence and ensure response times are met with minimal or no delay in getting care to the survivor.

### **SAFE Service Line**

These positions will also support alignment of the Adult/Adolescent and Pediatric SAFE Programs to standardize services and support program planning, policy development and provide operational leadership for medical forensic services for all ages. The recommended positions will reconfigure these programs into one streamlined healthcare service, remove redundant workflows and share practice resources, in addition to supporting critical expansion work. The approved positions will also support SAFE services for survivors of sexual assault, drug-facilitated assault, child physical abuse, intimate partner violence, and human trafficking at all SAFE locations, add suspect exams, and assist with education needs for health care providers regarding best practice care for survivors in emergency and primary care settings.

## **SAFE Program Quality and Process Improvement**

To ensure the expansion efforts and service provision are meaningful, both to survivors and stakeholders, quality metrics and improvement strategies must be identified. Of significant importance is the survivor's voice in determining what areas need or should be addressed. A recent survivor survey, completed for the purpose of looking at sexual assault services in Santa Clara County from the survivor's perspective, found that many survivors wished for better information on medical forensic services, how to access services and how to easily transfer to a SAFE response location if they initially present at a non-SAFE response facility. To help improve available information for community and survivor access, work is underway to improve the SAFE Program presence on the SCVMC website. This will include information on the spectrum of services available, how to find or navigate SAFE locations, what to expect and how to prepare for a medical forensic exam, and why medical care is an urgent need after sexual assault. Additionally, options for community education and SANE recruitment are being considered to increase the benefits of improved web presence.

Data is also key for quality improvement. It is anticipated that the SART database beta testing in 2021 will yield data that better informs SAFE practice and response, compared to data collected manually. Additionally, such a tool will elevate the current data collection and reporting capability and provide richer, more robust data for SART partners to use and to help provide dashboard data to show sexual assault trends in Santa Clara County. It is also hoped that an upcoming SAFE build in the hospital's electronic health record, HealthLink, will elevate available medical data to merge or compare with other datasets. This will help identify which components of the SART and/or SAFE processes add or remove value to the survivors, stakeholders or providers. It will also inform where the gaps and barriers to access exist and which should be prioritized for urgent improvement.

Innovations in training practices are also being addressed. Throughout the SAFE Program expansion efforts, options for new or better ways to train SANEs have been sought. Partnerships with the Nursing Schools at UC San Francisco and San Jose State University have made it clear how much simulation training and exercises benefit the training needs of exam teams and shorten training time to onboard new examiners. Our own work to develop simulation training curriculum has been very successful and will continue once dedicated space at SCVMC can be outfitted. Consideration is also being given to offering training as a regional partner, particularly for smaller rural teams with limited resources. The California Clinical Forensic Medical Training Center (CCFMTC) is the designated training facility for SAFE instruction in California; however, recent changes in oversight and training capabilities have eliminated this program as a training option for SCVMC SAFE. This has made in-house simulation training even more important for this program to utilize.

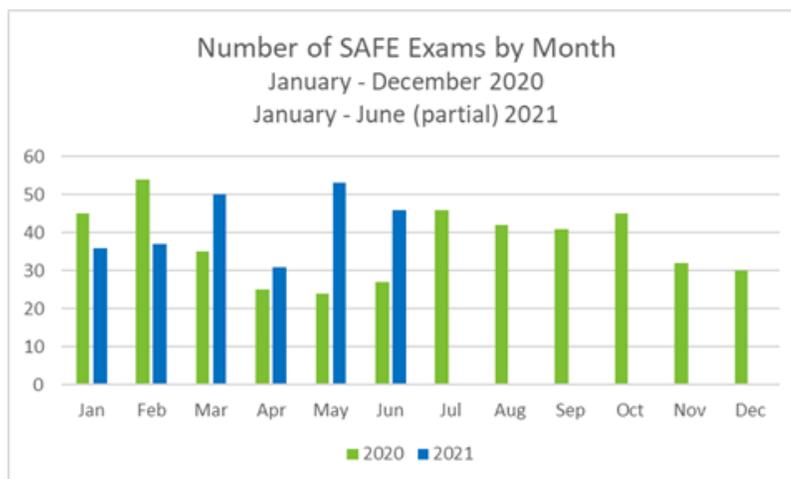
## SCVMC SAFE Program Activity

### SCVMC

Between 2015 and 2019, there was a 10% increase in cases annually. After an increase of 21% in the number of cases in the first quarter (Q1) of 2020, over the same time period in 2019, there was a significant drop in cases beginning late March 2020. This continued through May 2020, in conjunction with shelter in place orders. Cases increased again when the public health orders were relaxed in June 2020 and remained near normal until the end of the year. This pattern aligned with what other SAFE teams experienced, both in California and across the country.

In the first half (H1) of 2021 (**Figure 1**), the SCVMC SAFE Program has provided 254 medical forensic exams. Comparatively, 210 exams were completed in H12020 and 234 completed in H12019 (not shown), representing increases of 21% and 8.5%, respectively.

**Figure 1** – Number of SAFE Exams by Month in 2020 and 2021



The SCVMC campus location remains the busiest SAFE response site, given its central location in the County and proximity to jurisdictions for the two busiest law enforcement agencies. It also serves as the operational center for the SAFE Program.

### North County

Historically, survivors of sexual assault who presented at hospital facilities in north Santa Clara County were provided medical care and transferred to SCVMC by ambulance or law enforcement for SAFE services, including the medical forensic exam. Often, this added burden of distance and time to the process of receiving care, delaying access to trauma-informed SAFE care, and causing some survivors to choose to decline medical care and collection of evidence altogether. In partnership with Stanford Health Care (SHC) Emergency Department, a service response location was developed for the SCVMC SAFE Program to use for the delivery of medical forensic care in the north county, with a successful go-live in February 2020. Since that time, there has been uninterrupted service and 45

survivors have received medical forensic exams by SCVMC SAFE at the Stanford Hospital Emergency Department.

### South County

Work with St. Louise Regional Hospital is underway to establish a south county SAFE response location. The appropriate space for medical forensic exams has been identified and the various stakeholders have been engaged to develop and optimize workflows related to pharmacy services, laboratory services, emergency medical and nursing services, registration, security, infection prevention, environmental services, biomed, and billing services. Hospital administration has been supportive in these efforts and continues to work with the SAFE Program to streamline activity for go-live, targeted for October 2021 pending SAFE staffing stability. Since January 2021, a total of 26 medical forensic exams have been provided at SCVMC (as of mid-June) that potentially could have been completed at the south county location, based on the jurisdictional agencies involved, thus reinforcing the need. This represents 10% of the SAFE exams completed to date in 2021. Of note, this number includes cases from neighboring San Benito County, which totaled nine (9) exams in 2021.

### SCVMC SAFE Response in Santa Cruz County

In 2020, a total of 55 medical forensic exams were provided for survivors with cases in Santa Cruz jurisdictions. Of those, 24 were provided at the SCVMC SAFE response location near Dominican Hospital after it opened on August 24, 2020. In the first half of 2021, there were 27 medical forensic exams provided to survivors at that location. The SAFE Program continues to participate in bi-monthly sexual assault response team (SART) Committee meetings, where representatives from the Office of the District Attorney, Department of Justice Crime Lab, law enforcement agencies, rape crisis advocates, and UC Santa Cruz student services collaborate on workflows and improvement strategies for SART response in the county. SAFE Program representatives have also been providing trainings for the various law enforcement agencies on SAFE response and services, including information on non-fatal strangulation, particularly in the setting of intimate partner violence.

### SCVMC SAFE Response for Monterey County

SCVMC was recently approached by the United States Army Garrison, Presidio of Monterey (USAG POM) to provide medical forensic exams for their service members and qualified dependents, stationed at the Presidio. This request was prompted by changes in the service provision by the Monterey SAFE Program that now requires USAG POM to take survivors to other military bases and they wish to partner with Santa Clara County for SAFE exams more proximal to Monterey. It is anticipated that USAG POM will prioritize the south county SAFE response location for their cases, though any SAFE location in Santa Clara County would be available for their use. A final agreement with USAG POM is pending.

## **CONSEQUENCES OF NEGATIVE ACTION**

The Health and Hospital Committee would not receive the requested information.

## **LINKS:**

- **Linked To: 104309 :** Receive report from Santa Clara Valley Medical Center relating to status updates for the Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE) Program.
- **Linked To: 106747 :** Consider recommendations relating to sexual assault forensic exam services. (Simitian)
- **Linked To: 105042 :** Receive semi-annual report from the Office of Gender-Based Violence Prevention.
- **Linked To: 102977 :** Receive report from the Office of Gender-Based Violence Prevention relating to the status of initiatives to support better data as a result of the Sexual Assault Response Time Study and Process Mapping.
- **Linked To: 100971 :** Receive report from the Office of Gender-Based Violence Prevention relating to next steps and needs assessment for sexual assault mapping.
- **Linked From: 107293 :** Receive report from Santa Clara Valley Medical Center relating to Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE) services at all SAFE response sites.
- **Linked From: 107681 :** Receive report from Santa Clara Valley Medical Center relating to status updates for the Sexual Assault Forensic Exam Program.
- **Linked From: 108044 :** Receive report from Santa Clara Valley Medical Center (SCVMC) relating to status updates for the Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE) Program.
- **Linked From: 108388 :** Receive report from Santa Clara Valley Medical Center relating to status updates for the Sexual Assault Forensic Exam Program.
- **Linked From: 108798 :** Receive report from Santa Clara Valley Medical Center relating to status updates for the SAFE Program.
- **Linked From: 111659 :** Receive report from Santa Clara Valley Medical Center relating to status updates for the Sexual Assault Forensic Exam Program.
- **Referenced By: 116673 :** Receive report from Santa Clara Valley Healthcare relating to the Adult/Adolescent Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE) Program.
- **Linked From: 118794 :** Receive report from Santa Clara Valley Medical Center relating to the Adult/Adolescent Sexual Assault Forensic Exam Program.

## **ATTACHMENTS:**

- **Printout (PDF)**
- **StanfordHealthCareLtr\_SCCHHC\_062221\_FINAL\_AllSig12\_LF ID 106814\_6-30-2021 HHC (PDF)**
- **SAFE program update ppt 6-30-21 HHC\_Item 7 (PDF)**
- **Written Correspondence (PDF)**
- **Off-Agenda Report relating to SAFE Response Locations(PDF)**