

# New “Rape Kit” Training Video Unveiled”

**NEW YORK**—Survivors of sexual assault and advocates joined New York State Deputy Secretary for Public Safety Denise E. O’Donnell and medical experts Thursday in unveiling a new “rape kit” training video, “A Body of Evidence: Using the NYS Sexual Offense Evidence Collection Kit”, designed for medical professionals to ensure that the inherently intrusive sexual assault evidence exam is less traumatic for victims and more productive for law enforcement.

“A medical professional’s first allegiance is always to the well-being of his or her patient,” said Deputy Secretary O’Donnell, a former federal prosecutor. “But when confronted with a sexual assault, emergency department physicians and nurses have an additional and often unsettling responsibility – the collection of physical evidence. This evidence is absolutely crucial in apprehending sexual assailants, and stopping them before they can strike again.”

The state Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) recently revamped the New York State Sexual Offense Evidence Collection Kit, often referred to as the “rape kit,” to reflect advances in DNA technology and to streamline an inevitably discomfiting physical examination. The kit is provided by DCJS to all hospital emergency departments across the state and allows for a standardized evidence collection process in all sexual assault cases.

Susan Xenarios, director of the Crime Victims Treatment Center at St. Luke’s and Roosevelt Hospitals, said that in dealing with a sexual assault, medical professionals must strike a delicate balance between their clinical and legal responsibilities. She said the new kit and training video provides the medical community with the tools and insight to fulfill their medical and legal obligations, without shortchanging either.

“As a director of a crime victim’s assistance program and a rape crisis center in a New York City teaching hospital, on-going training of medical staff is essential to maintain a high standard of care,” Ms. Xenarios said. “Not only will this instructional video make a difference in the training of medical providers in New York State, I believe it will ensure a higher standard of medical care and collection of forensic evidence for all victims of sexual assault. At the very least, they deserve that from our medical institutions.”

St. Luke’s – Roosevelt was one of 11 test sites for the new kit and one of its renowned physicians, Dr. Lorraine Giordano, provided technical assistance on the training video.

“Every medical professional in New York State who cares for survivors of sexual violence would

benefit from viewing this excellent DVD,” said Dr. Giordano, Medical Director of the St. Luke’s-Roosevelt Hospital and Beth Israel Medical Center’s Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner (SAFE) program. “I look forward to using this very practical resource to teach state-of-the-art forensic evidence collection to emergency department physicians and SAFE examiners.”

In addition to the new kit, DCJS also is distributing the training video that features an introduction by award winning actress and advocate Mariska Hargitay of NBC’s Law & Order: Special Victims Unit. The video, which has been endorsed by the New York Academy of Medicine and certified for continuing education credits for doctors, provides a step-by-step demonstration on the proper collection of evidence.

Ms. Hargitay, who plays Detective Olivia Benson in the hit series, said she became attuned to the epidemic of sexual assault when she started receiving hundreds of letters and emails from survivors desperate to share their story. In 2004, she founded the Joyful Heart Foundation (<http://www.joyfulheartfoundation.org/>) to heal, educate and empower survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence and child abuse, and to shed light into the darkness that surrounds these issues.

“That these individuals were willing to reach out to someone they knew only as a character on television showed me how desperately they needed to be heard, believed, understood, comforted and healed,” Ms. Hargitay said. “The healing process often begins at the hospital.”

Among those also appearing in the video are: Manhattan’s top sex crimes prosecutor, Lisa Friel, Chief of the Sex Crimes Unit in the New York County District Attorney’s Office; Julie Pizziketti, Assistant Director of Biological Sciences at the New York State Police Forensic Investigation Center; sexual assault nurse examiners Anne Galloway of Vera House in Syracuse and Erin Ptak of Family Services, Inc. in Poughkeepsie; and Sasha Helton, Crime Victims Specialist with Family Services, Inc.

“Producing this video was a collaborative effort that involved individuals from many different disciplines and many agencies and organizations, including

Albany Memorial Hospital, which generously permitted us to utilize a portion of their emergency department to film the exam, and the worldwide advertising team from BBDO New York, which provided invaluable graphic design assistance at no charge,” Deputy Secretary O’Donnell noted. “On behalf of Governor David A. Paterson, I would

like to extend our sincere thanks to everyone who helped make this video such an informative and powerful educational tool.”

Jennifer P. Goodale, Board Chair, Joyful Heart Foundation, tireless advocate and rape survivor, added: “After the trauma of a rape, the medical examination should not feel like another assault. Trained doctors and nurses can lead the way in providing the care and attention that are so fundamentally important to a survivor’s recovery.”

Joyful Heart vice chair Linda Fairstein, bestselling author and the former chief Manhattan sex crimes prosecutor who convicted Jennifer’s rapist, said, “There is nothing more important in the quest for justice for rape survivors than getting the scientific evidence collected at the crime scene properly analyzed so that it can be used in the courtroom. This new sexual assault evidence collection kit, designed to reduce the victim’s trauma during the exam, and to preserve the necessary evidence for the police and forensic biologists, is a critically important advance for the criminal justice system.”

The Violence Against Woman unit at DCJS worked in partnership with individuals from every discipline – medical, legal, scientific and social work – to update the kit to better serve victims of sexual assault and provide a better tool for medical practitioners who are collecting evidence. The new kit and training video provide detailed directions that allow any medical practitioner – not just specially trained examiners – to do the collection properly. In addition to revamping and distributing the rape kit, the unit administers federal funding that comes to New York State for programs that serve victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking.

“Each step in the 15-step process is explained in detail, making the kit easy to use for both Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners – medical professionals, typically nurses, who are specifically trained to conduct examinations of sexual assault victims – and those professionals who have not received the very specialized training,” Deputy Secretary O’Donnell said. “This is particularly important because many smaller or rural hospitals do not have trained Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners on staff.”

The kit, which is approximately the size of a shoe box, was produced by PWI, a company in Allegany County that provides training, employment and vocational opportunities to individuals with disabilities. New York Network, a service of the State University of New York, produced the video. Kits and training videos are provided free to hospitals across the state. ■