

Law & better rape kit

TV star joins forces with pros to revamp DNA evidence tool

EXCLUSIVE

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A NEW KIT FOR collecting forensic evidence from rape victims will be unveiled today — the first revamping of the crucial tool in 20 years.

The new kit allows examiners to take many more DNA samples from different parts of the body, involves a more comprehensive examination and also addresses male victims.

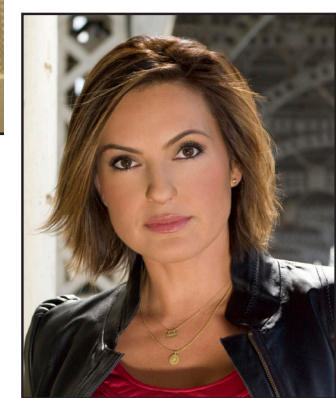
"DNA technology has made us look at forensic evidence collection differently," said Susan Xenarios, director of the Crime Victims Treatment Center at St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital, who helped update the kit.

DNA evidence has led to more rape cases and convictions, and even longer sentences when there's a guilty plea, said Miss Gregory, first deputy chief of the Brooklyn district attorney's sex crimes bureau.

"We'll get more cases," with the new kit, Gregory said.

"Anytime there is DNA, it takes out the fallibility of human beings. Jurors are so inclined to listen more when there is DNA in a sex crimes case."

The Violence Against Women unit at the state Division of Criminal Jus-



Susan Xenarios, director of the Crime Victims Treatment Center at St. Luke's-Roosevelt, holds up a revamped DNA collection rape kit, with an introductory video by "Law & Order" star Mariska Hargitay (inset). The kit also addresses male victims. Photo by Daniella Zalcmán

tice Services worked with legal experts, medical professionals, scientists and social workers to update the kit - commonly referred to as a "rape kit."

State Deputy Secretary for Public Safety Denise O'Donnell will unveil the kit, in a white shoebox-sized container.

"This evidence is absolutely crucial in apprehending sexual assailants, and stopping them before they can strike again," she said.

The kit comes with a training video, with an

introduction by Mariska Hargitay, star of "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit."

The detailed video will enable nurses and doctors who are not trained in sexual assault evidence collection to do the forensic exam.

Hargitay became a supporter of sex abuse victims when she started receiving letters and e-mails from survivors writing to her character, Detective Olivia Benson.

In 2004, she founded the Joyful Heart Foundation for survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence and child abu-se.

Xenarios helped create a statewide, standardized rape kit in the late 1980s, but, she said, "It was simplistic, just envelopes with instructions" - and didn't reflect new scientific advances.

St. Luke's-Roosevelt, which uses up to 200 rape kits a year, was one of 11 test sites in the state for the new kit.

The new kit's inclusion of male victims will be helpful, Xenarios said. Nationally, men make up 2% to 3% of rape victims in hospital emergency rooms, but they account for 14% at St. Luke's.

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