

## IDENTIFYING VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN A HEALTHCARE SETTING

Healthcare providers may come into contact with victims of human trafficking and have a unique opportunity to connect them with much needed support and services. Anyone in a healthcare setting may be in a position to recognize human trafficking – from clerical staff to lab technicians, nursing staff, ambulatory care, radiology staff, security personnel, case managers, and physicians

The following — adapted from materials provided by the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) — offers red flags and indicators that medical providers may see in a patient who may be a victim of human trafficking. Please note that this list is not exhaustive. Each indicator taken individually may not imply a trafficking situation and not all victims of human trafficking will exhibit these signs. However, the recognition of several indicators may point to the need for referrals and further assessment.

### Red Flags and Indicators

#### General Indicators of Human Trafficking

- Shares a scripted or inconsistent history
- Is unwilling or hesitant to answer questions about the injury or illness
- Is accompanied by an individual who does not let the patient speak for themselves, refuses to let the patient have privacy, or who interprets for them
- Evidence of controlling or dominating relationships (excessive concerns about pleasing a family member, romantic partner, or employer)
- Demonstrates fearful or nervous behavior or avoids eye contact
- Is resistant to assistance or demonstrates hostile behavior
- Is unable to provide his/her address
- Is not aware of his/her location, the current date, or time
- Is not in possession of his/her identification documents
- Is not in control of his or her own money
- Is not being paid or wages are withheld

#### Labor Trafficking Indicators

- Has been abused at work or threatened with harm by an employer or supervisor
- Is not allowed to take adequate breaks, food, or water while at work
- Is not provided with adequate personal protective equipment for hazardous work
- Was recruited for different work than he/she is currently doing
- Is required to live in housing provided by employer
- Has a debt to employer or recruiter that he/she cannot pay off

#### Sex Trafficking Indicators

- Patient is under the age of 18 and is involved in the commercial sex industry
- Has tattoos or other forms of branding, such as tattoos that say, “Daddy,” “Property of ...,” “For sale,” etc.
- Reports an unusually high numbers of sexual partners
- Does not have appropriate clothing for the weather or venue
- Uses language common in the commercial sex industry

#### What should I do if I believe I have identified a victim of human trafficking?

Call the **National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC)** hotline at **1-888-373-7888**. Ask for assistance with assessment and next steps, following all HIPAA & mandatory reporting regulations. The NHTRC Hotline is a confidential hotline, is operated 24-7, and has access to 200+ languages. Text: 233733. Email: [nhtrc@polarisproject.org](mailto:nhtrc@polarisproject.org). For more information, visit the NHTH website: [www.humantraffickinghotline.org](http://www.humantraffickinghotline.org)

## Health Indicators and Consequences of Human Trafficking\*

### Physical Health Indicators

- Signs of physical abuse or unexplained injuries
  - Bruising
  - Burns
  - Cuts or wounds
  - Blunt force trauma
  - Fractures
  - Broken teeth
  - Signs of torture
- Neurological conditions
  - Traumatic brain injury
  - Headaches or migraines
  - Unexplained memory loss
  - Vertigo of unknown etiology
  - Insomnia
  - Difficulty concentrating
- Cardiovascular/respiratory conditions that appear to be caused or worsened by stress:
  - Arrhythmia
  - High blood pressure
  - Acute Respiratory Distress
- Gastrointestinal conditions that appear to be caused or worsened by stress:
  - Constipation
  - Irritable bowel syndrome
- Dietary health issues
  - Severe weight loss
  - Malnutrition
  - Loss of appetite
- Reproductive issues
  - Sexually-transmitted infections
  - Genitourinary issues
  - Repeated unwanted pregnancies
  - Forced or pressured abortions
  - Genital trauma
  - Sexual dysfunction
  - Retained foreign body
- Substance use disorders
- Other health issues
  - Effects of prolonged exposure to extreme temperatures
  - Effects of prolonged exposure to industrial or agricultural chemicals
  - Somatic complaints

### Mental Health Indicators

- Depression
- Suicidal Ideation
- Self-harming behaviors
- Anxiety
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Nightmares
- Flashbacks
- Lack of emotional responsiveness
- Feelings of shame or guilt
- Hypervigilance
- Hostility
- Attachment disorders
  - Lack of OR difficulty in engaging in social interactions
  - Signs of withdrawal, fear, sadness or irritability
- Dissociation disorders
  - Memory Loss
  - A sense of being detached from themselves
  - A lack of a sense of self-identity or switching between alternate identities
  - A perception of the people and things around them as distorted or unreal

### Social or Developmental Indicators

- Increased engagement in high risk behaviors, such as running away or early sexual initiation, if a minor
- Trauma bonding with trafficker or other victims (e.g., Stockholm syndrome)
- Difficulty establishing or maintaining healthy relationships
- Delayed physical or cognitive development
- Impaired social skills

\*The list of physical and mental health indicators of human trafficking is not exhaustive. Trafficking survivors may experience one or more of these indicators, none of these indicators, or health indicators not on this list. This list is intended to help you assess if a patient's condition may be a result of a trafficking-related trauma and should be considered in context.

### Local Resources

- In case of emergency, call 911.
- Contact **EAC Network's Child Advocacy Center** at (631) 439-0480 for assistance and services within Suffolk County. After 5:00 pm and on weekends, contact the **Safe Harbour** hotline number at (631) 533-5658.
- If you suspect the child's parent/guardian is involved in the trafficking, call the **New York State Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment (SCR)** at 1-800-342-3720.