



## *Letter to the Editor*

### **Response to “Health Care Needs of Sex Trafficking Patients”**

Dear Dr. Carter-Snell,

I am Anna Becks, Forensic Unit Manager at MetroHealth Hospital, a Level I trauma center in Cleveland, Ohio. I am writing in response to Calow’s article on the “Health Care Needs of Sex Trafficking Patients,” published in the *Journal of the Academy of Forensic Nursing* (Calow, 2024). The article highlights the challenges healthcare providers face with victims who often present with multiple injuries and inconsistent stories and how human trafficking signs are frequently overlooked, leading to inadequate care and potentially life-threatening health issues (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2024a). This letter aims to highlight the critical gaps in recognizing and addressing human trafficking in healthcare settings, share insights from my efforts to improve identification and support for victims and underline the importance of education and comprehensive training for healthcare professionals.

A key challenge is the lack of education for healthcare providers on recognizing human trafficking, which is not included in healthcare training. While Ohio mandates education on human trafficking for various professions, including cosmetologists and law enforcement, tanning salons and schools, healthcare providers are not covered (Ohio Legislative Service Commission, 2024). A system-wide education program has been implemented at our hospital to address this gap. Before this initiative, there were only three victims identified in 2022. Since introducing the program in April 2023, we identified 21 victims in the first nine months and an additional 27 in the subsequent seven months. Education at the local county jail was also extended to recognize the prevalence of carceral backgrounds among victims of human trafficking. Over the past 12 months, this has led to the identification of 6 victims within the carceral system.

The article also notes missed opportunities to educate victims on their healthcare needs. In response, I secured a grant from AGO, funding 40 hours per week for an in-house forensic nurse. This nurse screens patients in the emergency department, provides education, and ensures proper medication before discharge. The National Human Trafficking Prevention Framework highlights the importance of peer supporters in helping victims access available assistance (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Task Force et al., 2024). Our peer supporter follows victims throughout their exit journey, attending medical appointments, rehabilitation, and court hearings and providing mental health support.

Using the public health approach to violence prevention—assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation—has been crucial in our work. This model has allowed me to educate multidisciplinary teams, including EMS, police, and healthcare providers, improving our ability to identify and support victims (CDC, 2024b). Our comprehensive approach, integrating education and collaboration, has significantly enhanced victim identification and care. The

## LETTER TO EDITOR

involvement of a peer supporter and survivor has provided invaluable insights, making our training more effective.

Thank you for considering this important issue and for your commitment to improving healthcare responses to human trafficking.

Sincerely,

Anna Becks, BSN, RN,  
Sexual assault nurse examiner  
Forensic Unit Manager  
MetroHealth Hospital

### References

- Calow, N. . (2024). Health Care Needs of the Sex Trafficking Patient. *Journal of the Academy of Forensic Nursing*, 2(1), 23–27. <https://doi.org/10.29173/jafn645>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention -CDC (2024a). About sex trafficking. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/sexual-violence/about/about-sex-trafficking.html>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention -CDC (2024b). About the public health approach to violence prevention. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/violence-prevention/about/about-the-public-health-approach-to-violence-prevention.html>
- Ohio Legislative Service Commission (2024). Ohio Legislative Service Commission. Available at <https://www.lsc.ohio.gov/>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Task Force et al (2024) National human trafficking prevention framework: A public health approach to preventing human trafficking. Office on Trafficking in Persons. Available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/otip/report/national-human-trafficking-prevention-framework>