



A Position Statement on Human Trafficking

The American Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses (ASPAN) advocates for an environment of safety where perianesthesia registered nurses deliver quality care to all patient populations undergoing anesthesia for surgery or procedures. ASPAN sets forth this position statement to increase awareness and acknowledge the need for increased surveillance for potential victims of human trafficking.

Background

The Joint Commission reports that the United States is one of the main markets and destinations for human trafficking victims globally.¹ The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime defines trafficking as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.”² Additionally, exploitation can include prostitution, sexual exploitation, forced labor, slavery, servitude, or the removal of organs. Targeted individuals come from low income families, impoverished neighborhoods, children aged out of foster care, runaways, homeless, and persons lured from foreign countries with the promise of a better life.³

Human trafficking is an economically motivated crime. It is a \$150 billion dollar illegal industry worldwide. Millions of individuals are exploited through violence, deception, threats, or debt bondage and forced to engage in commercial sex or provide labor services against their will.⁴ The International Labour Organization estimates there are 40.3 million victims globally.⁴

In 2016, the Global Slavery Index estimated that in the United States over 403,000 individuals were living in conditions of slavery, an incidence of 1.3 victims for every thousand people.⁵ Although several government agencies collect data on victims of slavery, the United States does not provide a singular set of statistics due to federal privacy laws restricting the sharing of personal health information.⁴ Regardless, legislation targeted at training healthcare team members, punishment of offenders, and assistance for victims have been initiated in Congress.⁵

Identification of victims of human trafficking is essential but can have negative consequences for the discovered individual. Traffickers control their victims by making threats against family members, notifying immigration, blackmailing with photos or evidence of illegal behaviors, informing law enforcement, confiscating legal documents, and restricting telephone and internet access.^{5,6} Victims often keep silent about their situation due



^aVulnerable populations for human trafficking include, but are not limited to, the following¹:

- Victims of childhood abuse or neglect
- Children involved in foster care and juvenile justice system
- Runaway and homeless youth
- Native Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders
- Victims of violence
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) individuals
- Migrant workers
- Undocumented immigrants
- Racial and ethnic minorities
- People with disabilities
- People with low incomes
- Individuals with a history of substance abuse disorders
- Persons from communities exposed to known intergenerational trauma.

to shame or fear of being humiliated. Since medical care is occasionally necessary for trafficking victims, health care professionals are in a unique position to help these unfortunate victims.^{6,a}

Position

ASPAN is highly committed as an advocate for providing a culture of safety in all perianesthesia practice settings, for the patient, the nurse, and the healthcare team. Perianesthesia registered nurses should become familiar with recognizing the following signs of human trafficking^{3,6,7}:

- Avoidance of eye contact
- Fearful, anxious, depressed, submissive, tense, nervous or paranoid appearance
- Refusal to change into a gown and/or to cooperate
- Behavior or demeanor that does not align with injury or complaint
- Refusal of treatment that does not take place during that visit
- Appearance of malnourishment
- Report of a birthdate inconsistent with appearance and development
- Evidence of repeated exposure to harmful chemicals
- Indications of physical and/or sexual abuse, physical restraint, confinement or torture
- Inappropriate attire for weather
- Not allowed to control or handle identification (ID or passport) or money
- Not permitted to speak for themselves (a third party may insist on being present and/or interpreting, may inhibit discussions, refuse to permit medical provider privacy with the patient)
- Inability to clarify address related to where he/she is staying
- Uncertain of whereabouts and/or of what city he/she is in
- Loss of sense of time
- Inconsistent reporting of his/her story
- Presence of tattoo(s), brand(s) or other marking(s)

Expected Outcomes

Approximately 87% of victims of human trafficking have been seen by a member of the healthcare team.^{5,8,9} Hospital emergency departments have seen 63% of this exploited population.⁸ Many victims seeking care may go unrecognized or be mistaken for victims of domestic violence, drug addicts, or prostitutes. Failure to identify a trafficking victim in a healthcare facility could lead to tragic consequences or even death for that person. Not all victims will be ready to seek assistance, and health care professionals cannot force an adult victim to report the crime of human trafficking. However, if the victim is a minor (under 18 years of age), the provider is legally obligated to contact Child Protective Services per your facility policy. Because perianesthesia registered nurses could be frontline caregivers for this population, they need to know how to identify victims and refer them to appropriate resources. Healthcare facilities should have protocols in place that outline a process for recognizing the signs of human trafficking and taking action. These processes should include safety mechanisms that protect both perianesthesia nurses and patients.

ASPAN advocates for the promotion of holistic, inclusive, and comprehensive care to all patients. Increasing awareness through education promotes better awareness and identification of this vulnerable population.

Approval of Statement

This statement was reviewed by the ASPAN Board of Directors on April 19, 2020, and approved by a vote of the ASPAN Representative Assembly on April 26, 2020.

REFERENCES

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ADDITIONAL READING

Adult human trafficking screening tool and guide. Administration for Children & Families. Office on Trafficking In Persons. 2018. Accessed July 10, 2020. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/otip/adult_human_trafficking_screening_tool_and_guide.pdf

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