

*Examining the Availability of SAFE Kits
at Hospitals in the United States*

Statement of

Lynn Frederick-Hawley
Executive Director
Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention Program
Mount Sinai Hospital

Testimony before the
U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

December 12th

Washington, DC

Chairman Walden, Ranking Member DeGette, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I would also like to acknowledge and thank Representative Tonko and Representative Clarke from New York.

My name is Lynn Frederick-Hawley and I am the Executive Director of the Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention Program at The Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City.

Founded in 1852, The Mount Sinai Hospital is one of the nation's largest and most respected hospitals, acclaimed internationally for excellence in clinical care. Ranked among the top hospitals nationwide, we serve one of the most diverse populations in the world.

It has been a priority at The Mount Sinai Hospital for decades to maintain a comprehensive program to address the needs of sexual assault survivors. Our goal is to provide the highest quality medical care and compassionate, client-centered services to address both the patient's physical and psychological trauma. We believe it is critical to validate, heal and empower survivors and their supporters to lead safe, healthy lives through advocacy, free and confidential counseling, and education. In fact, The Mount Sinai Hospital is one of the few institutions with a dedicated program exclusively focused on providing outreach, comprehensive training, emergency room advocacy and counseling services to address the needs of past and present victims of sexual assault and domestic violence. SAVI was founded in 1984, and we have grown exponentially in the past 34 years to meet the evolving needs of survivors and our communities, including creating our Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner Program. I should emphasize that this evolution has been made possible by the support of Mount Sinai leadership, the availability of funding for this kind of programming and the backing of the communities we serve.

Our Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner (SAFE) program has been designated a "center of excellence" since 2006 by the New York State Department of Health. In addition to the SAFE Program, we maintain over 150 highly trained volunteer Advocates who are on call 24/7 to respond to all instances of sexual assault. The Advocates, together with the trained SAFE clinicians, work seamlessly to provide comprehensive services to the sexual assault survivors seeking care at The Mount Sinai Hospital. SAVI therapists are then available to support the survivor beyond the immediate crisis services received in the Emergency Department.

Specifically, The Mount Sinai Hospital and its affiliate medical school, the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, employ 23 SAFE's – medical professionals who have decided to take additional steps through SAVI to be able to expertly serve survivors of sexual assault in acute settings. These include ten nurses, seven physician assistants and six physicians. All are employed full time by Mount Sinai, screened by SAVI for this role, have completed extensive additional training to qualify as a SAFE, and completed a preceptorship. In addition, many of the SAFE trained staff work in the Emergency

Department and they are able to provide services to a patient if the on-call SAFE clinician is unexpectedly unavailable.

I would like to take you through the protocol for treating survivors of sexual violence who seek care at our Hospital. As an initial matter, we have a strong protocol in place for clinicians and staff to identify potential survivors of sexual assault and respond sensitively. Once a patient discloses sexual assault, they are triaged to a private, designated SAFE-equipped room. Both the on-call SAFE and SAVI Advocate are contacted to come to our hospital to provide care and treatment to the patient. The Advocate is a certified volunteer who provides counseling, support, information, referral, advocacy and safety planning to the survivor. The Advocate remains with the survivor throughout their stay in the hospital. The SAFE conducts the medical and evidence collection exam, consistent with the patient's consent and wishes. Specific medical protocols and regimens are followed in the event the survivor is a candidate for and chooses a prophylaxis medication. The patient receives detailed discharge instructions and treatment/counseling options including follow-up for any medical care or continued prescription medication.

The SAVI staff then follow up with every patient to provide ongoing support including free therapy, advocacy and referral information. If an evidence collection kit is completed, the survivor can choose whether to report the assault to the New York City Police Department and sign the kit over to them immediately or to have the kit held with Mount Sinai Security until they decide if they want to file an official police report. New York State recently passed a new law requiring the preservation of the kit for a minimum of 20 years. We are fully complying with the new law. Additionally, the SAFE and Advocate are debriefed following every case to which they respond in order for us to support the providers, address any questions that arose, and conduct ongoing quality assurance.

In order to provide this multilayered response to sexual assault survivors, many resources must be invested. This is not care that survivors should be expected to underwrite, and none of SAVI's services, including our SAFE Program, generate income. So it is the vision of an institution like Mount Sinai that sees the overarching benefit and necessity of providing this care to survivors and provides the context in which it can happen, as well as the availability/accessibility of funding from our city, state, federal and community partners, that makes this even possible. It is not just raising a child that takes a village.

On that note, I want to thank the Committee for their attention to this matter. The safety and support of these patients is of utmost importance.

I will be happy to answer any questions you have. Thank you.