

To: • NHS provider trusts
• NHS primary care contractors
• NHS England and NHS Improvement regional senior management teams

NHS England and NHS Improvement
Skipton House
80 London Road
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11 February 2022

Dear colleague,

Identifying and responding to sexual assault and abuse – a reminder of our responsibilities and how the NHS is addressing this

This week - Sexual Abuse and Sexual Violence Awareness Week - the NHS launched a three month campaign to raise awareness of sexual assault referral centres (SARCs) and to encourage victims and survivors to seek help.

We ask for your support with the delivery of this campaign to ensure that anyone who has experienced sexual assault and abuse, regardless of how long ago, knows where to get help. Whether this applies to our patients or staff, SARCs are available to everyone.

Actions to take:

- Ensure staff are aware of SARCs, the services they provide and how to refer into them.
- Communications teams should promote the SARC campaign via your organisation's communication channels and feature materials in waiting rooms.
- Remind staff of training and resources available to identify and respond to sexual assault and abuse.
- Remind NHS managers of their roles and responsibilities in relation to safeguarding, as well as their legal obligation to assess any risk and support the health, safety and wellness of their employees.

Further information on SARCs is available at www.nhs.uk/SARCs

Tackling hidden harms arising from the pandemic

As part of a cross government commitment to tackle hidden harms arising from the pandemic, the NHS is raising awareness of SARCs and encouraging victims and survivors of sexual assault and abuse to seek help.

SARCs are commissioned by NHS England and NHS Improvement and police and crime commissioners. They offer a range of services, including crisis care, medical and forensic examinations, emergency contraception and testing for sexually transmitted infections. SARCs can also arrange access to an independent sexual violence advisor (ISVA), as well as referrals to mental health support and voluntary sector sexual violence

support services. These services are located across the country and available via appointment 24/7.

SARC campaign

Campaign materials are available via the [Campaign Resource Centre](#) and include a powerful film that addresses common questions and concerns many people face after being raped, sexually assaulted or abused; an animation explaining what happens in a SARC; as well as a range of digital and printable assets which communications leads can use.

Further information on the campaign, as well as links to training, guidance and resources on sexual assault and abuse are included in the appendix. Please ensure this information is cascaded to staff, as well as to other organisations and networks as you see appropriate.

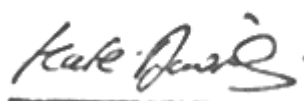
We all need to ensure that the NHS is taking the right action to identify, safeguard and care for individuals who have been or are being sexually assaulted or abused.

Thank you for your support.

Yours faithfully



Amanda Pritchard
Chief Executive Officer
NHS England and NHS Improvement



Kate Davies CBE
Director of Health and Justice, Armed
Forces and Sexual Assault Services
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Supporting signatures:



Ruth May
Chief Nursing Officer
NHS England and NHS
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**Professor Em Wilkinson-
Brice**
Deputy Chief People Officer
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Dr Nikita Kanani MBE
Medical Director for Primary
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Sara Hurley

Chief Dental Officer
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**Prof Jacqueline Dunkley-
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Dr Matthew Jolly

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David Webb

Chief Pharmaceutical Officer
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Suzanne Rastrick

Chief Allied Health
Professions Officer
NHS England and NHS
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Prof Stephen Powis

National Medical Director
NHS England and NHS
Improvement

Appendix

How individuals can access a SARC

Anyone who has experienced rape, sexual assault or sexual abuse, regardless of how long ago, can attend a SARC.

Individuals can telephone their nearest SARC to make an appointment or ask someone else, such as a healthcare professional, 111 call handler, friend or family member to do this. Contact details for SARCs are available via this [directory of services](#).

Adults who access a SARC will have the option of reporting an incident to the police. There is no pressure for them to do this and it is their choice to make.

Referrals for children are managed via children's social care and / or police services.

Information on SARCs and help following sexual assault and abuse is available on the NHS website at www.nhs.uk/SARCs.

Resources for NHS staff

Many people do not disclose that they have experienced sexual assault and abuse and it is not uncommon for a survivor to have no physical injuries or signs of this. Recognising the signs and understanding more about sexual assault and abuse is important. Below are useful resources for NHS staff.

- [Health Education England: Identifying and Responding to Sexual Assault and Abuse Programme e-learning course](#) which provides information and advice on identifying and responding to sexual assault and abuse.
- Campaign [animation](#) which explains what happens at a SARC.
- IRISi [guidance](#) for GP teams, including how to enquire about domestic abuse, including sexual assault and abuse, during telephone and video consultations.
- Royal College of Nursing [resources](#) on spotting the signs of domestic abuse.
- Against Violence & Abuse (AVA): [guidance](#) for mental health professionals.
- Chief Dental Officer [advice bulletin](#) for dental professionals on spotting the signs of abuse and supporting patients.

Resources for NHS managers

The [Safeguarding Children, Young People and Adults at Risk in the NHS: Safeguarding Accountability and Assurance Framework](#) sets out the roles and responsibilities of all individuals working in providers of NHS-funded care settings and NHS commissioning organisations. This includes a duty to support victims to ensure they receive timely care and support, whether from the NHS, police or a third sector service. It also sets out the duties to attend to perpetrators.

It is important to remember that sexual assault and abuse do not just affect patients. As an employer, NHS organisations have a legal obligation to assess any risk and support the health and safety and wellness of their employees.

The NHS Employer resource, [Domestic violence and abuse: supporting NHS staff](#), is designed to provide organisations with information about things to include when developing a domestic violence and abuse policy.

Resources for communications teams

The aim of the marketing campaign, which has been co-developed with individuals who have lived experience of sexual assault and abuse and those providing care and support in this area, is to raise awareness of SARCs and encourage victims and survivors to seek help. Activity will focus in particular on the following groups who are underrepresented in SARCs and/or at greater risk of sexual assault and abuse:

- Women from ethnically diverse backgrounds aged 18-33
- Men aged 18-25
- LGBTQ+ communities 18-33

In the South East of England, there will also be a targeted effort on the over 18 adult population.

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