

Recognize the Signs of Human Trafficking for Healthcare Professionals

Human trafficking is a form of modern day slavery involving the illegal trade of human beings for the purpose of exploitation or commercial gain. Victims can be of any age, race, and gender regardless of immigration status. These victims live in cities, suburbs and rural areas in every state of the U.S., as well as other countries. As healthcare providers we are in a unique situation to identify these potential victims. Can you recognize the potential signs of human trafficking? While no one indicator or combination of indicators automatically confirms that someone is a victim of human trafficking, the following indicators should act as warning signs.

Poor Mental Health or Abnormal Behavior

- Is fearful, anxious, depressed, submissive, tense, or nervous/paranoid
- Exhibits unusually fearful or anxious behavior after bringing up law enforcement
- Avoids eye contact
- Submissive, fearful, seems afraid to speak in the presence of others

Poor Physical Health

- Lacks health care or dental care; untreated chronic disease
- Appears to be suffering from malnutrition, dehydration, exhaustion
- Shows signs of physical and/or sexual abuse, physical restraint, confinement, or torture
- Bruises or wounds in various stages of healing or consistent with the use of physical restraint
- Scars, mutilation, or untreated infections that cannot be explained by the patient
- Urinary difficulties, pelvic pain, frequent STDs, pregnancy, or rectal trauma (from working in the sexual industry)
- Chronic back, hearing, eye/eyesight, cardiovascular, or respiratory issues

Control Indicators

- Has few or no personal possessions
- Is not in control of his/her own money, no financial records, or bank account
- Is not in control of his/her own identification documents (ID or passport)
- Is not allowed or able to speak for themselves, accompanied by another person who is controlling and/or does all of the communicating
- Is not allowed to contact friends/family or to freely socialize or attend religious services

Living Conditions

- Inadequately dressed for the situation or work that is performed
- Lives in degraded, unsuitable place or shares sleeping quarters
- Lives with security measures designed to restrict movement; blocked/barred windows, locked doors, barbed wire, security cameras
- Lacks personal possessions and appear to have an unstable living situation
- Deprived of food, water, sleep, medical care or other life necessities

Additional Indicators

- Difficulty communicating due to cultural or language barriers
- Seems confused, claims to be visiting or seems unable to identify his or her location
- Reluctant to discuss his or her injury or there are inconsistencies in the account of the injury or medical history

To request help or report suspected human trafficking, call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-3737-888 or text HELP to: BeFree (233733).