## **Lack Of Nurse Training Creates Barriers For SD Rape Victims**

BY MARK WALKER Argus Leader

SIOUX FALLS — A lack of forensic training for nurses across much of South Dakota is prolonging the distance rape victims need to travel in

search of justice. Certified sexual assault nurse examiners receive a week of training every three years and a test on how to counsel victims, collect DNA evidence, and serve as an expert witness in court if needed.

Only two nurses currently meet the criteria in South

The state's major hospital systems both offer training to nurses, but they also acknowledge beyond Sioux Falls a victim isn't guaranteed to find a nurse highly trained to assist them in the critical first hours and days after an

It's a problem faced in other rural states, though no neighboring state has fewer certified sexual assault nurse examiners than South Dakota.

'Small facilities don't have the money to staff a person for something like this," said Paul Schoenfelder, chief nursing officer at Winner Regional Hospital.

The Sioux Falls Police Department has 160 untested kits in its evidence locker that it now plans to send to the state crime lab for testing.

Getting evidence to police in the first place, though, depends on access to nurses who know how to collect it. In much of the state, that might mean a several-hour drive to Sioux Falls. Schoenfelder said Winner often refers victims three hours away to Sioux

"My experience is when a sexual assault presents to a rural hospital, if they are inexperienced, they will refer that patient here," said Christopher Carlisle, an emergency physician at Sanford Medical Center in Sioux Falls.

Sanford has two nurses, one in Sioux Falls and another who splits time between here and Brookings, who have sexual assault examiner certifications from the International Association of Forensic Nurses.

Two others at Sanford Aberdeen Hospital are working toward certification, and 10 more in Sioux Falls have completed some specialized training on rape examinations but not enough for

Avera doesn't have any certified sexual assault nurse examiners but it has 14 nurses in Sioux Falls and three in Yankton who have been through some training on the sexual assault exams.

'The medical forensic exam is more than the collecGoryl, chief executive of the International Association of

Forensic Nurses Sexual assault nurse examiners are trained to take victims to a private area away from the bustling emergency room and then never leave the victim's side until the process is over. The victim is interviewed, given a brief medical questionnaire and swabbed for DNA evidence. Injuries are documented and clothes are bagged as evidence.

It's described as an embarrassing ordeal for the victim, but essential to the process

The biggest fear for a practitioner is that you screw something up so that the case against a person is compromised because the evidence kits were mishandled," Carlisle said.

At hospitals without sexual assault nurse examiners, rape victims are treated like anyone else brought into the emergency room. They are typically placed in an emergency room with a nurse who is also responsible for several other patients, making one-on-one attention difficult.

Things might be missed, questions may go unan-swered, (and) referrals might not be made," said Sandra Minter, one of South Dakota's certified sexual assault examiners.

Efforts are under way to expand training and certification across the state.

The Compass Center, a Sioux Falls organization that offers counseling and advocacy services to victims of sexual assault and domestic violence, will pilot a four-day online training this year aimed at reaching rural

"We will see how this first one goes and if we feel like the nurses are getting the training they need we will try and push that out more the next time they offer it,' executive director Michelle Markgraf said.

Robin Huether, director of the emergency department at Sanford, said the health system is building its roster of certified sexual assault nurse examiners and expanding training to all emergency department nurses.

Avera plans to send trained nurses across the state to conduct hour-long sessions with nurses who have less experience working with sexual assault victims.

We recognize not every nurse is a sexual assault examiner, nor can they be," said Deb Fischer Clemens, Avera McKennan's senior vice president for public policy, "but we also recognize we owe it to our patients to show the best care we can while collecting the evidence.'

## **Trial Begins Of Man Accused Of Harassing Indian Kids**

**BY JAMES NORD** Associated Press

RAPID CITY — Native Americans and activists packed into a theater doubling as a courtroom on Wednesday in part to protest what they view as lenient treatment of a South Dakota man accused of harassing American Indian children with racial slurs and spilling beer on them at a hockey game.

Protesters have criticized the state court's handling of the case against 41-year-old Trace O'Connell and have said it highlights racial issues that persist in the city and in South Dakota's justice system. O'Connell has pleaded not guilty to a disorderly conduct charge in Rapid City, the second-largest metropolitan area in South Dakota after Sioux Falls. The charge stems from the incident at a Rapid City Rush game in

Authorities say in a court complaint that O'Connell sprayed beer and used racially-charged language near a group of minors and adults at the ice arena in the Rushmore Plaza Civic Center in RapHorse School on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

More than 100 Native Americans and others gathered for the trial at Rapid City High School. The judge had it moved to a theater in the Performing Arts Center of Rapid City to accommodate an expected large turnout. A group of protesters stood outside of the high school shortly before the trial began as more than 20 people marched up the street waving flags and chanting, "Stop the hate!" Native Americans are the largest minority group in South Dakota at nine percent of the population.

Activists have protested the leniency of O'Connell's disorderly conduct charge under city code. The judge's decision to remove the possibility of jail time as a penalty also spurred anger from activists. Without jail time the maximum penalty is a fine of up to \$500.

Cody Hall, co-founder of Last Real Indians, an independent media and activist group, called the decision "a slap in the face."

O'Connell's attorney, Mike Butler of Sioux Falls, said the evidence in the didn't make threats of violence or abuse anyone at the game. O'Connell has admitted to police that he spilled beer while watching the game from a private suite, but a fellow attendee during testimony characterized the beer spraying as a celebratory gesture and not racially motivated.

"I'm as far away from being a racist as possible," said Brit Miller, who attended the game with O'Connell and said he never observed racial taunting. "It would not have been acceptable.

Butler said after the trial's first day ended that O'Connell is in Rapid City, but didn't attend the proceedings.

Keith Janis, a member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe from Kyle, South Dakota, said he came to the trial to hopefully witness justice for the children.

Janis, 56, said he doesn't think the beer spraying was accidental, and he said he hopes the judge isn't from Rapid City. Otherwise, Janis said, "He's going to side with the defendant."

"There's a double standard of justice here in South Dakota. Everybody who's Lakota knows that," Janis said.



## Nebraska Treasurer Seeks **Bidders For New Program**

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska State Treasurer Don Stenberg is seeking bidders to administer a new state program designed to help residents with

disabilities. Stenberg issued a request for proposals this week for the Achieving a Better Life Experience program approved by Nebraska lawmakers this year. Stenberg is the program's trustee.

Stenberg and the Nebraska Investment Council are

requesting proposals from financial service companies to provide customer, marketing, investment and administra-tive services. Proposals are

due by Sept. 10. The new law allows adults with intellectual disabilities and their families to save for medical, housing and educational needs. In past years, disabled adults could have lost Medicaid coverage and Social Security benefits if they accumulated more than \$2,000 in assets.

## **Backpack**

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families in the kingergarten

through eighth grades. The Contact Center has begun the effort again this year. The deadline to sign up

is August 20. The first year, the Contact Center purchased the backpacks and filled them with the appropriate school supplies per grade; since then, they have used vouchers to supply the backpacks for the children. The backpacks can be purchased at Kmart.

Kmart has been involved with the Contact Center's backpack program for several years.

"It was a great idea and we decided to participate,' said Jim Simpson, Kmart manager. "It's really good community involvement to help out people in need, and

it promotes business." In 2004, 110 children were involved with the backpack program. As of last year, the

number has grown to 176. The Contact Center involves itself with the local schools year-round by making sure the students have

what they need to get by. "If we see anybody without a coat, we'll try to assist them in making sure they

have that, as well as a hat and mittens," Stanage said. Seeing the fruits of their labor is something Contact Center employees greatly

enjoy.
"On some occasions, the kids will bring in the backpacks they picked out and show us," said Stanage. "That really makes my day."

To qualify to be a part of the backpack program, Yankton residents must have a valid ID and an active SNAP card. Vouchers can be picked up at the Contact Center, which is open from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday.

For more information, call the Contact Center at 605-260-4400 EXT. 2.

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