**FORENSIC NURSE EXAMINER PROTOCOL AND GUIDELINES FOR**

**Domestic Violence (DV) STRANGULATION VICTIMS**

**(This handout is meant for law enforcement use only. Please do not distribute to the general public).**

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**What is strangulation?** A serious felony offense. Strangulation victims are eight times more likely to be murdered. When a victim is strangled, loss of consciousness occurs in seconds, death in minutes. Strangulation is the most common felony domestic violence (DV) assault: The King County Prosecuting Attorney’s Office (KCPAO) files approximately 300 annually. [RCW 9A.36.021: Assault in the second degree. (wa.gov)](https://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=9A.36.021)

**Strangulation Investigations:** KCPAO recommends LEA use the updated DV Supplemental and DV Strangulation Supplemental Reports for patrol. See link for recommended forms. KCPAO recommends LEA-patrol provide victims with a strangulation card at the scene to promote information about strangulation FNE.

[Law Enforcement — DV Symposium](https://www.dvsymposium.org/law-enforcement) (www.dvsymposium.org/law-enforcement)

**What is a strangulation forensic nurse examination (FNE)?** Like FNE for sexual assault, a strangulation FNE provides medical treatment; information and support; assesses safety; collects and preserves medical findings and forensic evidence; provides information about victim services. The legislature made specific findings about strangulation and forensic nurse exams in RCW 7.68.803:

*The legislature finds that nonfatal strangulation is among the most dangerous acts of domestic violence and sexual assault. Strangulation involves external compression of the victim's airway and blood vessels, causing reduced air and blood flow to the brain. Victims may show no or minimal external signs of injury despite having life-threatening internal injuries including traumatic brain injury. Injuries may present after the assault or much later and may persist for months and even years post assault. Victims who are strangled multiple times face a greater risk of traumatic brain injury. Traumatic brain injury symptoms are often not recognized as assault-related and may include cognitive difficulties such as decreased ability to concentrate, make decisions, and solve problems. Traumatic brain injury symptoms may also include behavior and personality changes such as irritability, impulsivity, and mood swings.*

*Domestic violence victims who have been nonfatally strangled are eight times more likely to become a subsequent victim of homicide at the hands of the same abusive partner. Research shows that previous acts of strangulation are a unique and substantial predictor of attempted and completed homicide against an intimate partner.*

*For years, forensic nurses in Washington have provided high-level care to sexual assault victims. Forensic nurses are also trained in medical evaluation of nonfatal strangulation, but only provide this evaluation in cases of sexual assault involving strangulation, as crime victims' compensation will not reimburse in nonsexual assault cases. Strangulation affects victims physically and psychologically. These victims deserve a higher standard of response and medical care. Allowing crime victims' compensation to reimburse for forensic nurse examinations for victims of domestic violence strangulation will provide a better, more victim-centered response in the most dangerous of domestic violence felony cases.*

**Does it cost? No.** [**RCW 7.68.803: Nonfatal strangulation—Payment of costs for medical examination. (wa.gov)**](https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=7.68.803)Strangulation victims can receive a free FNE. FNEs are covered by Crime Victim Compensation (CVC) and have no cost to victims. The ambulance is free, as is the FNE and treatment (note: ambulance reimbursement is done separately under CVC). This service is available in the Emergency Rooms listed below 24-hours a day seven days a week—no prior appointment is needed.

**Do strangulation victims need to do anything special at the hospital?** A strangulation victim needs to go to one of the emergency departments listed below. When checking-in inform the staff that they are there seeking medical treatment as a result of being strangled. The emergency department will sort out best care and will coordinate with the FNEs.

**Are there time limits on strangulation FNEs?** Victims presenting within 5 days of the assault will be seen in the emergency room in a visit between the doctor, social worker and FNE. The FNE provides exam and evidence collection. Victims reporting strangulation within the past 7 days will be seen and evaluated in the emergency department by a doctor and social workers.

**What should EMTs do?** EMTs should encourage victims to seek medical care and inform victims of the option for a free forensic nurse examination. Law enforcement can arrange transportation to a participating emergency department, if needed.



**Where are strangulation forensic nurse exams available?**

**Seattle:**

Harborview: Weekdays: (206) 744-1600 - Intake Specialist or (206) 744-3000 - Attending on call.

After hours and weekends: (206) 744-4028

Seattle Children’s Hospital: (206)987-2000

Swedish- First Hill: (206) 386-6000

Virginia Mason Medical Center: (206) 624-1144

UWMC-Montlake Campus: (206) 598-3300

UWMC-Northwest Campus: (206)668-0500

**East King County:**

Evergreen Medical Center: (425) 899-1711

Overlake Medical Center: (425) 688-5100

**South King County:**

MultiCare Covington Medical Center; (253) 372-7400

MultiCare Auburn Medical Center: (253) 833-7711

St. Francis Hospital (Federal Way): (253) 944-8100

St. Elizabeth Hospital (Enumclaw):(360) 802-8800

St. Anne Hospital (Burien): (206) 244-9970

 (Ask for the Emergency Department)

**\*FNE reports are difficult to obtain from the hospital records departments. To obtain the reports, please confirm that the medical release specifically requests the Forensic Nurse and/or Sexual Assault Nurse Exam, as well as the Emergency Room records, radiology, etc.**