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The Role of the Victim Advocate

Summary
Instructor: Rape crisis advocate
Time needed: 2 hours for full investigations module (with one 10-minute break)

When delivering this module to patrol officers, the instructor has the option of cutting the tasks and subtasks indicated with an asterisk (*). The time needed should then be reduced to approximately 90 minutes.

Resources needed: Overhead projector
Local services handout
Resource materials from local rape crisis center
Resource materials on state victim compensation program

Task 1
Describe the role of the rape crisis (victim) advocate.
Presentation: Brief introduction (5 minutes)

Subtask 1.1
Describe 5 general aspects of a victim advocate's role across the various phases of the sexual assault investigation.
Activity: Listing exercise (10 minutes)

To begin exploring the role of the victim advocate, ask participants to take a moment and write down at least 5 activities that an advocate will engage in across the various phases of the sexual assault investigation. Make sure to give participants at least 30 seconds in which to write down these 5 activities. After participants appear to have completed their lists, call on individuals to share one of their responses. Give positive feedback on correct answers and gently correct any that are not quite on the mark.

Continue calling on individuals, asking them to add an activity only if it has not already been mentioned. When the group list appears to be complete, use the overhead to generate additional responses. Note that the list of activities in the overhead are not exhaustive; participants will likely generate responses that are not included on the overhead or are described differently.

Subtask 1.2
Explain how this role differs from that of a victim-witness specialist.
Presentation method: Brief lecture (5 minutes)

Subtask 1.3
Describe the activities of a victim advocate during the medical procedures.
Presentation method: Brief lecture (5 minutes)
Subtask 1.4
Describe the activities of a victim advocate during the police interview.
Presentation method: Brief lecture (5 minutes)

Subtask 1.5*
Describe the activities of a victim advocate during the investigative procedures.
Presentation method: Brief lecture (5 minutes)

Subtask 1.6*
Describe the activities of a victim advocate during courtroom proceedings.
Presentation method: Brief lecture (5 minutes)

Task 2
Discuss the relationship between law enforcement and victim advocates.
Presentation method: Brief introduction (5 minutes)

Subtask 2.1
List 3 benefits to law enforcement of working with a victim advocate during a sexual assault investigation.
Activity: Listing exercise (10 minutes)
To highlight the benefits to law enforcement of working with a rape crisis advocate, ask participants to take a moment and think of at least 3 of these benefits. Make sure to give participants at least 30 seconds in which to write down these 3 benefits. After participants appear to have generated ideas, call on individuals to share one of their examples. Give positive feedback on correct answers and gently correct any that are not quite on the mark.

Continue calling on individuals, asking them to add an idea only if it has not already been mentioned. When the group list appears to be complete, use the overhead to generate additional responses. Note that the list of benefits in the overhead are not exhaustive; participants will likely generate responses that are not included on the overhead or are described differently.

Subtask 2.2
Discuss concerns of law enforcement concerning the role of victim advocates in a sexual assault investigation.
Activity: Open-ended discussion (20 minutes)
To create an environment in which law enforcement participants can comfortably discuss their concerns regarding victim advocacy, ask them if they have any issues they would like to discuss regarding the relationship between officers and advocates. Participants will likely discuss the tension that has traditionally existed between these two professions, given the differences in organizational mission. Instructors must create an environment in which these questions and concerns can be discussed openly and honestly. It is critical that the advocate address these issues without defensiveness as this is a powerful "turnoff" for law enforcement audiences.
For example, officers frequently have a concern that victims tell advocates information that is being withheld from the investigation. Advocates must be honest in their response to this concern, but typically it is the case that advocates have the least information of all the professionals involved in the team response. Unlike police and medical personnel, advocates do not ask the victim to "tell her story" and victims can thus discuss emotional concerns with the advocate without providing such details. However, in the event that the victim does indicate that they have withheld information from law enforcement it is important for advocates to advise victims of the negative consequences of such action.

Officers also often have questions and concerns about the confidentiality that exists between victims and rape crisis advocates. It is imperative that advocates have a clear understanding of the protections that exist for confidentiality in communication with victims, and that this be communicated with officers. It is also helpful to explain the purpose of this protection, in order to allow victims a safe and comfortable environment in which discuss their concerns.

Another concern of law enforcement is often that victims who are lying about the assault could tell the advocate that the claim is fabricated while withholding this information from law enforcement. This concern is perhaps best addressed with a twofold approach. First, it is important to emphasize how unlikely this event truly is. Research suggests that only a small minority of sexual assault claims are fabricated. Moreover, one primary motivation for victims who do fabricate is to gain the attention and support granted to sexual assault victims. It is therefore unlikely that they would jeopardize this supportive response by telling the advocate that they are lying. HOWEVER, in the extremely unlikely event that a victim would tell the advocate that their claim was false, advocates need to be straightforward with police audiences about how they would respond to this situation - and explain why they would behave this way.

**Task 3**

Identify the services available for sexual assault victims in your jurisdiction.

**Activity: Local services assignment (10 minutes)**
**Materials: Handouts**
**Preparation: Determine correct local information**

Provide participants with the local services handout and ask them to indicate which of the services are currently available in their jurisdiction. Give participants sufficient time to complete the assignment, and then provide the correct answers for the jurisdiction in which training is provided. If the advocate trainer is from the same jurisdiction as participants, providing the correct responses is relatively straightforward. If the trainers are from another jurisdiction, however, the advocate must call the local rape crisis center to determine the correct answers for services available. This call must be made before training is conducted, to ensure that participants receive information that is current and accurate.

**Task 4**

Discuss the compensation program for crime victims in your state.

**Presentation method: Brief introduction (5 minutes)**
Subtask 4.1*
List 5 types of expenses that are reimbursable for crime victims in your state.

Activity: Listing exercise (10 minutes)
Ask participants to write down 5 types of expenses that are reimbursable for crime victims in their state. Allow enough time to generate and write these examples, and then put up the overhead and briefly discuss the correct answers. After discussing the types of expenses that are reimbursable for victims, ask participants if they have any questions or any items on their list that were not covered on the overhead.

Subtask 4.2*
Describe the process for obtaining victim compensation.

Presentation method: Brief lecture (5 minutes)

Local Services
Please indicate which of the following services are available in your community, and any special restrictions or notes on their availability.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Available Services</th>
<th>Notes/Restrictions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24-hour hotline with access to certified counselors</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone counseling for significant others</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and referrals for any interested individuals</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24-hour access to advocates who can respond to calls</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accompaniment/advocacy during the forensic exam</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accompaniment/advocacy during the police investigation</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accompaniment/advocacy during court proceedings</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-term counseling</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support groups for survivors of sexual assault</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support groups for significant others</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services available in other languages (please list)</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services available for individuals who are physically and/or mentally disabled</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available Services</td>
<td>Notes/Restrictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male counselors/advocates available</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community education programs</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional training available (e.g., for police,</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prosecutors, medical personnel; please list)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other services available:</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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