

Recognize Human Trafficking Victims Hidden in Plain Sight

You may encounter human trafficking victims...since almost 90% of these individuals access healthcare services, including pharmacies.

Victims of trafficking are exploited for labor or sex...and held captive through force, fraud, or coercion. For example, traffickers may recruit by kidnapping...or making false promises or threats.

It can happen anywhere...to people of any age, gender, race, etc.

But many healthcare workers don't feel prepared to identify the signs of trafficking...and appropriately respond. Use these tips to help.

Recognize potential red flags...and loop in your team if needed.

For example, stay alert for patients who seem coached, watched, or are with a controlling figure who speaks for them or answers questions.

Listen for histories that don't add up, such as inconsistencies when giving age or address...or difficulty stating the date or location.

Be aware of possible abuse. For instance, victims may have bruises, burns, cuts, etc...or marks or tattoos that indicate branding.

Or you may see multiple large purchases of condoms or pregnancy tests...repeat use of emergency contraception (*Plan B*, etc)...or recurrent antibiotics for sexually transmitted infections.

Build trust with patients...and help them feel safe. Those being trafficked may not see themselves as victims...due to shame or fear.

Use any brief private encounter, such as a walk to an OTC product or giving an immunization in a private room, to ask neutral questions.

For example, asking "How did your injury happen?" may reveal physical abuse. Get your pharmacist involved if responses seem concerning...or if the patient struggles to answer at all.

Know who to contact if you suspect trafficking...and follow your pharmacy's policies. Keep local and national resources handy.

For example, you can call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 888-373-7888...or text "HELP" to BeFree (233733). It's confidential...and can help determine what to do if you're seeing a case.

Don't give this written info to patients...traffickers may find it.

Learn more with our CE, *Human Trafficking Awareness in the Pharmacy*.

Key References:

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Cite this document as follows: Article, Recognize Human Trafficking Victims Hidden in Plain Sight, Pharmacy Technician's Letter, May 2024

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Pharmacy Technician's Letter. May 2024, No. 400510

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