

## Only one hospital in Nashville offers rape exams

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NASHVILLE, TN (WSMV) -

Victims of violent crimes would expect to receive medical treatment at any hospital, but in Nashville, that is not the case for rape. There is currently only one place victims can go to get an exam that could help prove a crime.

"I had absolutely no idea until the night I was raped," said Taylor Walker, a rape survivor. "I called 911 and I wanted to go to Baptist where my mom was a nurse."

But Walker was told she couldn't go there.

Fortunately, she was already in an ambulance that took her to the right place before Walker's traumatizing night in Nashville got any worse.

"It's hard enough to get yourself to the point of admitting that such a terrible thing happened to you, and then once you decide to go to the hospital to be turned away or told that there is only one hospital and you need to go to there. That's a lot to handle," Walker said.

In Davidson County, Nashville General is the only hospital victims can go to get a rape exam.

"Receiving a medical rape exam is the first thing a rape survivor should do," said Rachel Freeman, vice president of programming at the Sexual Assault Center in Nashville.

A rape exam is also the most important thing a survivor can do in capturing a predator, yet it is not as easy as one would think.

"You know I'm not sure I can explain why or how we got to that point," said Dr. Bill Paul, the director of the Metro Health Department.

"We are in the process of answering that question," Mayor Megan Barry said.

For years this is how the city has done it.

"I was surprised to hear that," Barry said.

Mayor Barry took action and created a team dedicated to figuring out how Nashville can make it easier for survivors to get help.

"My hope is that if a victim presents themselves, wherever they present themselves that they are going to get the services that they need immediately. So whatever that looks like is where I want to focus," Barry said.

Dr. Bill Paul, the director of the Metro Public Health Department, is the head of the committee.

He is currently working with hospitals in the area to see if adding these services to other hospitals is even doable.

"It's really important that it is done by someone that is very skilled, very sensitive who pays attention to all the details," Paul said.

The doctor or nurse is essentially collecting evidence that could be crucial in court.

"If that gets put in the wrong place or the wrong hands, if the chain of custody is messed up in any way, that can screw the whole investigation," Paul said.

Having one place for rape exams has worked well for police and the district attorney's office.

"Because in Nashville the same group has been doing it for so long it's a well-oiled, well working system," Freeman said.

It may be working, but sexual assault advocates and survivors want more.

"This is not a rare occurrence, and to have hospitals that are ready and prepared to deal with something like this I think it's common sense," Walker said.

Freeman told Channel 4 that more barriers make it more likely victims will give up on getting help.

"A rape survivor often has to repeat herself multiple times throughout the process of healing. Some people don't want to keep trying and that's totally understandable," she said.

Channel 4 asked Paul whether getting more hospitals to offer this exam would come down to a money or training issue.

"At this point we are going to look at different models. I don't think we are going to have major barriers on money or training," Paul said.

A small group of the committee the mayor formed met on Thursday afternoon at Nashville General to talk about different options.

The group will bring their ideas to the full committee meeting on June 7.