

THE EXAMINATION OF ALLEGED CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE VICTIMS

These examinations are co-ordinated by the Thames Valley Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) – the SOLACE Centre. Some cases may present directly to the A&E Department. Involve the Duty Paediatric Consultant at the earliest opportunity. The SOLACE Centre should be telephoned on 0845 519 7638 for such cases. Note that medical needs take priority and this must not delay any urgent medical care necessary.

ACUTE CASES

It will be unusual to be faced with an acute case requiring urgent medical evaluation. The three situations when this might be needed are:-

- When there is trauma/haemorrhage that requires urgent attention
- When other acute medical needs dictate (emergency contraception, prophylaxis for sexually transmitted or blood borne virus infections (STI/BBV)
- When there is a high chance of finding important forensic evidence

In forensic cases it is important to balance the importance of evidence gathering against the potential for inflicting further distress on the child. This is outlined in the SOLACE Thames Valley Police Guidance on Child Examinations for Child Sexual Abuse Offences.

These examinations will be organised by the SOLACE Centre and carried out by an appropriately skilled Forensic Physician (FP) and will usually involve photo documentation.

- If the child is over 13, or is through puberty (a girl will have started periods) and particularly if previously sexually active, the Paediatrician will not usually be involved. This examination is conducted by the FP on the rota.
- If the child is under 13 or is pre-pubertal (or pubertal status is unclear) or where the child is particularly vulnerable (due for example to disability) and an appropriately skilled FP is not available, then involvement of the Duty Paediatric Consultant will be needed.

The Paediatrician will need the help of the SOLACE Forensic Physician to ensure that the correct specimens are obtained and packaged. The Paediatrician will be expected to record the history and examination findings, to consider STI/BBV/emergency contraception issues and to ensure that follow up for these is organised. These examinations will be performed in hospital. The A&E department keep information on BBV prophylaxis.

In many of these cases a second examination with photo documentation will be needed. This will be performed by an appropriately skilled FP. If there are court proceedings the FP will give expert opinion on the forensic findings and the Paediatrician will be a witness of fact.

NON-ACUTE (HISTORIC) CASES

When emergency assessment is required the case will be managed by the SOLACE Centre. There are situations (especially in the preschool child, the disabled child and where there are issues of neglect) when a joint examination with FP and Paediatrician is in the child's best interest, but there will be time to organise this appropriately.