

The Methodist Dallas SANE Program, Making South Dallas “SANE”



The Methodist Dallas SANE Program brings desperately needed sexual assault crisis services to the area of Dallas where they are needed most, providing support and compassion for victims while also increasing the reporting and prosecution of this crime. Sexual violence is one of the most pervasive crimes in our nation transcending every boundary in our society and desolating the lives of children, teenagers, and adults alike; it is a crime that is rarely reported, a crime where victims are often shamed. SBDB created The SANE Initiative as part of its commitment to making Dallas America’s safest city with a mission to expand desperately needed sexual assault services in our community. According to The SANE Initiative’s Executive Director, Courtney Underwood, named “the Dallas area’s most prominent advocate for sex crime victims” by the Dallas Morning News, “This marks the first time in the history of Dallas that rape kits are available in South Dallas.”

The Methodist Dallas SANE Program provides 24/7 rapid response with compassionate, confidential care and forensic examinations for sexual assault victims 14 and older by certified Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANEs). Prior to this month, Dallas was the largest city in the country with only one SANE Program, despite the U.S. Department of Justice’s endorsement of SANEs as “the best development in victim services in the last twenty years.”

Prior to January of 2014, only two hospitals out of the 47 hospitals in Dallas county provided rape crisis programs, leaving thousands of Dallas victims falling through the cracks; however, the opening of The Methodist Dallas SANE Program is a huge advancement in bridging the gap in services. “For the first time in Dallas’s history rape kits are available in South Dallas and are being performed by highly trained Methodist SANEs who provide immediate and compassionate medical care in addition to the most advanced level of forensic evidence collection skills in the nation,” says Underwood.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, the basis of SANE Programs “is the belief that sexual assault victims have the right to immediate, compassionate, and comprehensive medical-level evaluation and treatment by a specially trained professional who has the expertise to anticipate their needs during this time of crisis.” As the only health system in the southern sector of Dallas County, Methodist Health System is committed to building a stronger, safer and healthier community. Last year, Methodist Health System provided more than \$125 million in nonreimbursed charity care to the underserved in our community. They are one of the oldest faith based non-profit health systems, and their mission is to save and improve lives through compassionate, quality healthcare.

The SANE Program fits perfectly into their mission, and their mission and charity fits perfectly into the needs of this community, particularly the needs of those ravaged by sexual violence. “The Methodist Dallas SANE Program typifies a life altering change for residents across the county, while also expanding services that will buttress and support Dallas’s Criminal Justice System,” Underwood says.

The opening of The Methodist Dallas SANE Program also marks Dallas County's first and only SANE Program at a trauma hospital. Patients treated at trauma centers have a 25% greater chance of survival, and now trauma patients who are victims of sexual violence will receive treatment while also having forensic evidence collected by a SANE, vastly increasing the likelihood that their attacker will be put behind bars. Moreover, Methodist Dallas SANEs are also providing a safe place for teenage victims of sexual assault to find hope, support, and healing; one out of every four girls and one out of every six boys will be sexually assaulted before their 18th birthday. "Teenage girls ages 14 and older face a four times greater risk of being victimized by sexual violence than any other segment of the population, and when sexual assault services are inaccessible many teenagers never receive the help or support they need," Underwood states; "As a survivor of rape at fifteen, I know how it feels to search for help in Dallas and to find none; teenagers must have a safe place to go for help in their community and now they finally have that in South Dallas."

All Methodist SANE exams will be performed at no cost to the victim, and victims and their friends and family will also receive on-site support and advocacy services from The Turning Point as well as access to additional long term advocacy and counseling services. The Turning Point's mission is to provide counseling, education, and advocacy for those impacted by sexual assault. All of which are free to both survivors and their friends and family members. "We are so excited to be able to provide advocates to Methodist. Advocates play a key role during a sexual assault exam. During one of the most difficult times in a survivor's life, a trained advocate is able to be there and support them, while also providing them with options that of which they may not otherwise be aware. We are so glad that Methodist has chosen The Turning Point to provide these essential services at their hospital," says Haleh Cochran of The Turning Point.