The Unique Role Healthcare Providers in Human Trafficking
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It is difficult to accurately measure a covert practice such as human trafficking, but conservative estimates by the International Labor Organization as well as a study by Dr. Bales from Roehampton University both give a range of 12.3 - 27 million slaves in the world today. 27 million human beings! That means there are more slaves now than at any other time in history. As Americans, it may be easy to disregard such statistics because 'modern day slavery happens only in third world countries'. We live in modern cities, safe suburbs, and small towns with law enforcement…so this really isn’t "our" problem. As of 2010, the best estimate of human trafficking within the United States includes domestic minor sex trafficking at 100,000. That is only the minors involved in sex trafficking, there are countless other victims of trafficking within the U.S. As students of a healthcare profession, we are placed in a unique position to identify and help victims of human trafficking.

Trafficked individuals are generally kept out of the public arena to minimize their chance of escape or contact possible sources of assistance. Although every effort is made to minimize public contact, the abusive nature of human trafficking often leads to victims being injured or falling ill requiring medical attention. Traffickers commonly seek medical attention for the victim to maintain the profitability of the victim; they consider the risk of being identified and exposed by a health care provider to be small. It is vitally important that we take advantage of the intimate opportunity we have in medicine to advocate for our patient, intervene and break the cycle of trafficking.

There is no single set of signs that reveal that an individual has been trafficked, but there are certain features that are red flags that may lead you to ask additional questions. For example, if the patient has migrated for employment such as housekeeping, nannying, agricultural work, or manufacturing, these are all commonly associated with human trafficking. Another indicator of a trafficked individual can be when a patient is accompanied by a person that frequently answers questions for them and controls their interactions with you as the provider. The patient may also present with signs of trauma or injuries associated with abuse or sexual violence. If you detect any of these red flags, it is helpful to further evaluate the situation by speaking privately with the
patient. It may be necessary to take that patient to have lab work done in another part of the office or to ask the accompanying individual to step out for a private part of the exam.

When you suspect a patient is the victim of trafficking, the most important part of your advocacy is the work you do before you even see them: identify local resources for trafficked individuals, learn about local laws regarding trafficking, and know the safe places to refer them to in your area. As healthcare providers, it is within our means to identify, intervene and make a difference in the lives of trafficked individuals. Additional resources regarding human trafficking and healthcare provider roles in human trafficking can be found below.

Resources
- The National Human Trafficking Resource Center has a national hotline that is available 24/7 at 1-888-373-7888. They are able to help you determine if you have encountered a victim of human trafficking and can connect you with local anti-trafficking services in your area.
- CMDA has CME material regarding dealing with human trafficking in healthcare at www.cmda.org/WCM/CMDA/Navigation/Human_Trafficking/Continuing_Education.aspx
- The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime published a handbook for healthcare providers regarding the care of trafficked persons. It is available free on their website at http://www.unodc.org/documents/hiv-aids/publications/Caring_for_Trafficked_Persons_Guidance_for_Health_Providers_2009.pdf They also have additional information that covers different aspects of human trafficking on their website.
- Several organizations that are addressing human trafficking have been compiled at www.enditmovement.com

Sources