

**Identifying Victims of Human Trafficking:  
What to Look for in a Healthcare Setting**

Healthcare providers may come into contact with victims of human trafficking and have a unique opportunity to connect them with much needed support and services. Anyone in a healthcare setting may be in a position to recognize human trafficking – from clerical staff to lab technicians, nursing staff, ambulatory care, radiology staff, security personnel, case managers, and physicians.

The following is a list potential red flags and indicators that medical providers may see in a patient who may be a victim of human trafficking. Please note that this list is not exhaustive. Each indicator taken individually may not imply a trafficking situation and not all victims of human trafficking will exhibit these signs. However, the recognition of several indicators may point to the need for referrals and further assessment.

**Red Flags and Indicators**

<b>General Indicators of Human Trafficking</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Shares a scripted or inconsistent history</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is unwilling or hesitant to answer questions about the injury or illness</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is accompanied by an individual who does not let the patient speak for themselves, refuses to let the patient have privacy, or who interprets for them</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Evidence of controlling or dominating relationships (excessive concerns about pleasing a family member, romantic partner, or employer)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates fearful or nervous behavior or avoids eye contact</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is resistant to assistance or demonstrates hostile behavior</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is unable to provide his/her address</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is not aware of his/her location, the current date, or time</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is not in possession of his/her identification documents</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is not in control of his or her own money</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is not being paid or wages are withheld</li> </ul>	
<b>Labor Trafficking Indicators</b>	<b>Sex Trafficking Indicators</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Has been abused at work or threatened with harm by an employer or supervisor</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is not allowed to take adequate breaks, food, or water while at work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is not provided with adequate personal protective equipment for hazardous work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Was recruited for different work than he/she is currently doing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is required to live in housing provided by employer</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Has a debt to employer or recruiter that he/she cannot pay off</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Patient is under the age of 18 and is involved in the commercial sex industry</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Has tattoos or other forms of branding, such as tattoos that say, “Daddy,” “Property of...,” “For sale,” etc.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Reports an unusually high numbers of sexual partners</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Does not have appropriate clothing for the weather or venue</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Uses language common in the commercial sex industry</li> </ul>

## Health Indicators and Consequences of Human Trafficking\*<sup>i</sup>

### Physical Health Indicators

- Signs of physical abuse or unexplained injuries
  - Bruising
  - Burns
  - Cuts or wounds
  - Blunt force trauma
  - Fractures
  - Broken teeth
  - Signs of torture
- Neurological conditions
  - Traumatic brain injury
  - Headaches or migraines
  - Unexplained memory loss
  - Vertigo of unknown etiology
  - Insomnia
  - Difficulty concentrating
- Cardiovascular<sup>ii</sup>/respiratory<sup>iii</sup> conditions that appear to be caused or worsened by stress, such as:
  - Arrhythmia
  - High blood pressure
  - Acute Respiratory Distress
- Gastrointestinal conditions that appear to be caused or worsened by stress<sup>iv</sup>, such as:
  - Constipation
  - Irritable bowel syndrome
- Dietary health issues
  - Severe weight loss
  - Malnutrition
  - Loss of appetite
- Reproductive issues
  - Sexually-transmitted infections
  - Genitourinary issues
  - Repeated unwanted pregnancies
  - Forced or pressured abortions
  - Genital trauma
  - Sexual dysfunction
  - Retained foreign body
- Substance use disorders
- Other health issues
  - Effects of prolonged exposure to extreme temperatures
  - Effects of prolonged exposure to industrial or agricultural chemicals
  - Somatic complaints

### Mental Health Indicators

- Depression
- Suicidal ideation
- Self-harming behaviors
- Anxiety
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Nightmares
- Flashbacks
- Lack of emotional responsiveness
- Feelings of shame or guilt
- Hyper-vigilance
- Hostility
- Attachment disorders<sup>v</sup>
  - Lack of or difficulty in engaging in social interactions
  - Signs of withdrawal, fear, sadness, or irritability
- Depersonalization or derealization<sup>vi</sup>
  - Feeling like an outside observer of themselves, as if watching themselves in a movie
  - Emotional or physical numbness of senses
  - Feeling alienated from or unfamiliar with their surroundings
  - Distortions in perception of time
- Dissociation disorders<sup>vii</sup>
  - Memory loss
  - A sense of being detached from themselves
  - A lack of a sense of self-identity, or switching between alternate identities
  - A perception of the people and things around them as distorted or unreal

### Social or Developmental Indicators

- Increased engagement in high risk behaviors, such as running away or early sexual initiation if a minor
- Trauma bonding with trafficker or other victims (e.g. Stockholm syndrome)
- Difficulty establishing or maintaining healthy relationships
- Delayed physical or cognitive development
- Impaired social skills

*\*This list of physical and mental health indicators of human trafficking is not exhaustive. Trafficking survivors may experience one or more of these indicators, none of these indicators, or health indicators not on this list. This list is intended to help you assess if a patient's condition may be a result of a trafficking-related trauma and should be considered in context.*