

### HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS CAN HELP END THE CYCLE OF SILENCE

Most victims of sexual assault do not report the crime to law enforcement. Many never tell anyone. Then because so few assaults are reported – most perpetrators walk free. Sometimes, a victim will come to the hospital first, rather than going to the police, and you may be the very first person they tell. What will your reaction be?

It's time to end this cycle of silence. As a health care professional, you can take the lead.

### WHAT IS START BY BELIEVING?

Start by Believing is a public awareness campaign designed to end the cycle of silence and change the way we respond to sexual assault. It was first launched in April 2011. Since then, thousands of professionals across the country and around the world have made their own personal commitment:

*My name is Jami Lympany. I am an RN. When someone tells me they were raped or sexually assaulted, I Start by Believing.*

*My name is Abigail Wells. I am Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner. When someone tells me they were raped or sexually assaulted, I Start by Believing.*

*My name is Lucia Torres. I am Emergency Room nurse at Good Shepherd Emergency Department in Barrington, Illinois. In my career, I helped a lot of victims of sexual assault. When someone tells me they were raped or sexually assaulted, I Start by Believing.*

But it's more than just a personal pledge. By transforming personal and professional responses to sexual assault, we can help victims pursue justice and healing.

**Failed responses... additional victims.**

**Stop the cycle and make our communities safer.**

### WHY IS THE PLEDGE IMPORTANT?

Decades of research demonstrates that sexual assault victims are often doubted or blamed, and these negative responses have a number of harmful effects. They also decrease the chance that victims will report the crime and reach out for help.



*I went to a bar with some friends and the bartender offered me and my friends free beers. Later, he asked me if I wanted a free shot. After saying yes, he took me back into a dark room and kissed me. I told him I wanted to leave. He kept trying to stop me. Finally, he pulled down my pants and, as I said no, raped me anally. I gave up fighting for a second, but finally got away. I went to a well-known hospital in the nation's capital. No rape kit. In the end, I felt too scared to take legal action.*

This is why the message of Start by Believing is so vital - outcomes will only change when sexual assault reports are investigated from an initial presumption of merit.

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS?

Anyone can make a commitment to Start by Believing in their personal life. But some have questioned whether it is appropriate for health care providers, particularly those who conduct medical forensic examinations. Not only is the message appropriate for these professionals, it is the way they do business in every patient encounter.

When a patient tells a nurse or doctor that her stomach hurts, the health care provider will begin evaluation and treatment from that assumption – while remaining open to alternative possibilities. Similarly, when a patient says he was sexually assaulted, treatment and services will begin from that starting point.

In fact, it is not the role of a health care provider to make a determination regarding whether or not a patient has been sexually assaulted. That is a legal question. The health care provider's role is simply to provide testing, treatment and services, which can include forensic evidence collection when requested. If the health care provider is later called to testify in court, their conclusion will simply be to determine whether the findings are or are not “consistent” or “congruent” with the history given by the patient.

Mercy Medical Center  
Forensic Nurses,  
Baltimore, MD



Want to learn more? Our [Training Bulletin](#) addresses this issue in detail.

### TAKE THE PLEDGE

Start by making your own personal commitment to Start by Believing.

- Start by making your own personal commitment to Start by Believing.
- I pledge to Start by Believing when someone tells me about their sexual assault.
- I pledge to help survivors on the road to justice and healing.
- I pledge to end the cycle of silence.

[Pledge now](#)

### SPREAD THE WORD

Then share the message with others. We have all the tools you need. Check out our [personal action kit](#) and [community action kit](#) to learn how to get started.

**Display posters or brochures** with the Start by Believing logo in prominent areas where victims and their loved ones will see them, such as the hospital lobby, Emergency Department waiting area, forensic exam room, and on your facility's website.

Saint Luke's Health System,  
Greater Kansas City  
Metropolitan area



Brought to you by End Violence Against Women International, America's leading nonprofit organization dedicated to improving criminal justice responses to sexual assault.

**Compose a blog about the campaign**, such as this [Healthy Driven Blog](#) from Edward-Elmhurst Health.

**Encourage hospital administrators to make the pledge:** When the message comes from the top, it trickles down into daily actions that have a powerful impact on the community. You can encourage strong leadership in your hospital and community.

Elmhurst, Illinois  
Hospital Administrators



**Use social media** to announce support of Start by Believing by sending out a tweet or post with the commitment placard. We've said it before, and it's worth saying again – use social media!

**Get other Sexual Assault Response and Resource Team members on board** by creating a committee to launch a Start by Believing campaign in your community. See our [community action kit](#) for more information.

**Kick off your campaign with a press conference:** Follow the example of Denver, Colorado, where their event was a true representation of what multidisciplinary collaboration looks like. Participants included Mayor Michael B. Hancock's office, the Denver District Attorney's Office, the Denver Department of Public Safety, the Denver Police Department, the Denver Sheriff's Department, the Denver Fire Department, Denver Health Medical Center, the Sexual Assault Interagency Council, and The Blue Bench (a community-based sexual assault advocacy program). Also featured was a [young male survivor and his mother](#).



**Use creative marketing to reach thousands:** In Denver, the campaign message was prominently displayed on three billboards throughout the city, as well as 50 bus shelter advertisements, and 20 Yellow Cab displays. An additional 2,000 Yellow Cabs had bumper stickers proclaiming the Start by Believing message.

Yellow cab displays



**Conduct a presentation** on sexual assault and show the Start by Believing [slideshow](#).

**Need more support?** Submit a request for [technical assistance](#). Thank you for becoming a Start by Believing Ally!

