

## COMMUNITY

**Burnaby to  
Boston Bar**

**BC Lower Mainland,  
Fraser Valley**

**Project:**

## ***Training on Human Trafficking Awareness and Response for Health Practitioners***

**Burnaby to Boston Bar in BC Lower Mainland—Fraser Valley**

### **Forensic Nurse Examiners Receive International Attention**

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WHEN BCNU MEMBERS Larena Dodd, Aimee Falkenberg and Tara Wilkie awoke on Nov. 8, the Fraser Health Authority forensic nurse examiners found themselves on the front page of the *Vancouver Sun*.

The Sun feature story detailed how the nurses developed Canada's first online learning module to raise awareness about human trafficking, and to train emergency health care workers to identify and assist patients who may be trafficked.

"The response has been extremely positive," says Falkenberg of the newspaper article. Wilkie says she's humbled by the attention. "We've been contacted by people around the world, the response has been international."

"This research is the first of its kind in Canada," says Dodd, who noted that when the nurses began researching course content, they found that the information available on human trafficking wasn't appropriate for health care providers working in primary care. They also wanted to dispel myths about trafficking. "Even though human trafficking is an international problem, we are predominantly dealing with the trafficking of Canadian citizens," explains Wilkie.

The nurses believe that health care workers recognize when trafficked persons access health care, and there is an opportunity to identify them and offer options, even if the patient does not initially ask for help. "Health care providers instinctually knew that something wasn't right prior to the training, but they either didn't have a name for it, or they didn't know what to do. They lacked a process," Falkenberg recalls.

The nurses' solution involved more than online education. They also created a health authority-wide response component for trafficking or violence, and worked to ensure that health care providers in Burnaby could respond to a patient showing red flags the same way care providers in Hope could.

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The team developed checklists to help staff with patient assessments, information on who to involve in referrals and guidelines on how to provide help when they recognize the red flags. “We’ve opened up the window so the patient doesn’t have to say the right words to get to the services that can help them,” explains Dodd.

“This has become much more than just a health care response. This has become a community response, about joining health care with every other sector to make this whole puzzle fit together and result in cohesive healing for those who are experiencing violence and trafficking,” says Wilkie.

All three credit their many partnerships for the program’s success. Dodd cites the city of Surrey’s SMART (Surrey Mobile Assault Response Team) – where a nurse focuses on a woman’s medical and forensic care while a SMART worker assists with helping access social workers, housing and childcare – as a valuable program that allows them to continue helping patients once they walk out the hospital door.

“We’re a small group of nurses, but working to develop a program like this is very empowering,” says Wilkie.

The training is now available to any health care provider in BC employed by a health authority at [ccrs.vch.ca/Default.aspx](https://ccrs.vch.ca/Default.aspx) (under “Course Search” type: *Human Trafficking*).