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Another look at human trafficking

By Sascha Matuszak

Sascha Matuszak (sascha.matuszak@corporatecompliance.org) is a reporter at SCCE & HCCA in Minneapolis, MN, USA.

Human trafficking is regarded as one of the fastest growing criminal enterprises in the world, affecting some 50 million people worldwide and pulling in an estimated \$150 billion USD annually. Trafficking disproportionately affects women and children, who are often forced into modern slavery as workers or sexually exploited. Men are not immune, however, as millions of workers are forced into dangerous conditions where they work for little or no pay. One of the major challenges in addressing this global problem is identifying victims and helping them leave their oppressive situations and find resources. One industry that sits on the front line of this issue is healthcare.

Victims of human trafficking will, at some point in their lives, access healthcare. When they do, healthcare professionals are uniquely positioned identify victims and help them seek the resources they need to escape and regain control over their lives. Several studies support the idea that healthcare can play a strong role in preventing human trafficking and protecting victims, and several organizations are taking note and instituting the necessary policies to make a difference.

In December of 2018, the New York State Department of Health issued new regulations and guidance on hospital policies for human trafficking victims. The following month, the NYC Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence^[1] hosted a forum attended by a group of New York healthcare providers. The forum addressed human trafficking and how healthcare providers should respond. They discussed how to implement the new regulations, which require hospitals and clinics to create policies to identify, treat, and refer victims of human trafficking, as well as other potential strategies, such as staff training and a better sharing of medical records.

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