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COUNTY OF SHASTA

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Press Release

FUNDING FOR ON-CALL SART NURSES SECURED

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District Attorney Jerry Benito and Shasta Women's Refuge Executive Director are pleased to announce that funding has been identified to maintain a program to have Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) Nurses available on-call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. SART nurses are specially trained nurses that conduct forensic (evidence gathering) examinations of rape victims. These examinations are critical to the investigation and prosecution of sexual assault cases. The examinations often take several hours to conduct and often occur shortly after the crime is reported. The evidence collected help investigators identify perpetrators and corroborate the sexual assault. The training and skill that these nurses possess extend beyond the medical aspects of the evidence collection process. These nurses have valuable experience in addressing the emotional aspects of being a victim of sexual assault and ensure that the process of evidence collection through the SART exam does not further victimize or traumatize the rape victim.

Although, by law, each law enforcement agency covers the actual cost of the exam itself, the law does not provide for funding to have the nurses on-call. Though not mandated, the law does state that if on-call services are provided, the County is responsible for paying the cost. Providing for the SART nurses to be on-call is extremely important to law enforcement and victims of sexual assault. Many sexual assault cases occur and are reported in the nighttime hours. Without an on-call SART nurse, victims have waited hours for a SART nurse to arrive to conduct the several hours long exam. Some become frustrated and refuse to cooperate- some even leave the hospital or police station. The long wait further traumatizes the victim and erodes confidence in those who are trying to help.

Prior to 2005, the former owners of Shasta Regional Medical Center (SRMC) had provided the SART nurses, a specially designed and dedicated SART examination room, and the total cost for the on-call nurses. In May 2005, SRMC faced serious financial problems and stopped all funding of the on-call nurses. From that time on, District Attorney Jerry Benito and Executive Director Maggie John have sought funding from any and every source possible to keep the program alive. After nearly 2 years of not having the on-call nurses, Shasta County and the City of Redding agreed to equally share the over \$100,000 a year costs to fund the program in March 2007.

In 2008, SRMC agreed to share the cost equally with the City of Redding and Shasta County- each paying a third. When Prime Health Care took over SRMC, they re-negotiated the contracts with their nurses, which caused a reduction of the on-call costs from over \$100,000 to approximately \$53,000 a year. This reduced cost occurred after the City and County had already allocated approximately \$34,000 each based on the higher cost. This allowed for some savings. A portion of those “savings” the City and the County realized were re-allocated for SART and carried over to this year. This amounts to approximately \$7,300 each for a total of \$14,600. (Final approval of the County’s contribution will be before Board of Supervisors on August 18, 2009.) However, because of the current financial crisis faced by both the City of Redding and Shasta County, neither could allocate additional funds needed to fully fund the program. Without additional funds, the on-call program would have been lost.

Given the current financial crisis faced by the City of Redding and Shasta County, Prime Health Care, the current owners of SRMC, agreed to fund the difference of approximately \$38,000 and continue to provide the SART nurses and the dedicated SART examination room. Chief Executive Officer Randall Hempling and Cyndy Gordon, Chief Nursing Officer/Administrator for SRMC acknowledged the critical nature of the on-call service that their SART nurses provided to victims of sexual assault and law enforcement. Consequently, they have graciously agreed to provide the remaining funding to keep the on-call program alive. By reducing the overall cost of providing the service through the re-negotiated contracts and contributing the remaining funds for this year, SRMC has saved the County over \$85,000.

This type of public-private cooperation and mutual aid relationship to benefit sexual assault victims is truly appreciated. Shasta County and the City of Redding stepped in when SRMC was in financial distress and now SRMC is stepping in when the governmental agencies are in financial distress. SRMC’s willingness to fund this program demonstrates a true commitment to assisting government in protecting its citizens and supporting victims of violent crime. At a time when so many people and programs are struggling to stay alive, this type of collaboration among the City of Redding, Shasta County and SRMC demonstrates that the sharing of resources, even in tough financial times, can get us through. Thank you to all who are contributing.

For further information, contact District Attorney Jerry Benito at 245-6310, Shasta Women’s Refuge Executive Director Maggie John at 244-0118 or Karen Hoyt for SRMC at 244-5412.

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