As emergency nurses, we are at the frontline of the health care system and are the safety net of our communities. We truly see and care for many patients who have not received care elsewhere. We all know that nursing school provides us the foundation to be a nurse; however, few say that nursing school prepares us to actually be an EMERGENCY nurse. That only comes with experience. In the emergency department we care for patients across the entire lifespan, including any element that faces us: from the baby we just delivered, the pediatric patient with reactive airway disease, the victim of violence, the behavioral health patient, or the victim of sexual assault, to the patient taking his/her last breath.

How are we prepared to face these challenges continuously presented to us? Some of us were simply trained on the job, maybe within a few shifts of shadowing another nurse; others were given more intensive residency training that lasted several months. Whatever training model you followed to begin your career as an emergency nurse, you would likely agree that it did not seem enough, and especially did not seem enough to make you feel trained to care for a victim of interpersonal violence or to handle a forensic case.

The National Center for Health Statistics estimates that approximately 37.2 million people visit an emergency care setting for injury-related complaints annually. The National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey showed that in 2016 there were 1.6 million visits to emergency departments in the United States for assault alone. It is reported that over 1 million lives are lost annually as a result of self-inflicted, interpersonal, or collective violence. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence estimates that more than 10 million people become victims of abuse annually in the United States, which means that on average 20 people experience intimate partner abuse every minute. Intimate violence represents 15% of all violent crimes.

The number of people affected by violence alone, according to the statistics above, is frightening. The “Trafficking in Persons Report” released in June, 2019, by the U.S. Department of State, reported that 24.9 million people are victims of human trafficking. It is staggering that approximately two-thirds of these victims will interface with the health care system at some point without being identified.

Caring for victims of various types of violence is not something for which we are all consistently trained. These are cases that not all of us see on a regular basis, depending on the type of care setting in which we work. However, we must be ready for whoever comes through our door at any point in time.

Thankfully, the Emergency Nurses Association (ENA) has resources available to help us identify and care for these victims/survivors. Some of these resources are the result of our ENA members recognizing a need and speaking up to advocate for their patients at the general assembly and asking ENA to create the necessary resources when they noticed there was a gap in our practice. Even as resources are created and disseminated, we may never know the full impact they have; however, we do know that by speaking up and asking ENA to help provide these resources we are positively affecting our profession and our patients. Remember, “One Person Can Make A Difference!”

REFERENCES