

## **Teal Talk, S2:E6 – Bringing Awareness to Forensic Nursing for Better Survivor Care with Tammy Robertson of OAESV**

### **Taylr Ucker-Lauderman**

Welcome to Teal Talk, a podcast brought to you by the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence — that's OAESV for short. We're your hosts, Taylr

### **Laurie Hamame**

and Laurie

### **Taylr Ucker-Lauderman**

and each episode we speak with professionals in the field to dive deep into the intersectional issues that affect survivors in Ohio.

### **Laurie Hamame**

Before we begin, we want to give a content warning that we will be discussing sexual violence and other issues that may be upsetting and triggering. If you need help, please feel free to call our resource line at 888.886.8388 during regular business hours, or the Ohio Sexual Violence Helpline 24/7 at 844.644.6435. Please take care of yourself.

### **Laurie Hamame**

2! 4! 6! 8! Welcome to episode 8 of Teal Talk. I can't believe we're creeping up towards the double digits. I'm so excited. I'm Laurie Hamame. I'm the Resource and Communications Coordinator at OAESV. And my wonderful co-host is

### **Taylr Ucker-Lauderman**

Taylr Ucker Lauderman. I'm the Chief Engagement Officer at OAESV. So today we are here because in November, we do have Forensic Nurses Week. It's November 5th through the 11th. And this was a week actually established by the International Association of Forensic Nurses to honor the extraordinary work of nurses who practice in this unique nursing specialty. So we also have one of our wonderful co-workers here, Tammy Robertson.

### **Laurie Hamame**

Tammy is the Statewide Director of Forensic Nursing. She has been involved with forensic nursing since 1999, working as a registered nurse in a level II trauma center in 2009. She completed her training as a sexual assault nurse examiner and forensic nurse examiner, providing pediatric and adult services. Tammy has had the opportunity to participate on many community and state committees, including the Sexual Assault Advisory Board of Ohio, the Sexual Assault Kit Tracking System with the Ohio Attorney General, and being president for the International Association of Forensic Nurses Ohio Chapter. Developing and providing forensic services to survivors has always been her top priority. She has developed and implemented hospital-based forensic programs, county sexual assault response teams, and trained law enforcement, prosecutors advocates, and medical staff. Hi, Tammy.

**Tammy Robertson**

Hi. How are you all?

**Laurie Hamame**

Doing great. You have been working in this role for such a long time.

**Tammy Robertson**

I have! First of all, I want to thank you all for inviting me here to talk about forensic nursing. And a little bit about me since you've read my bio, and that pretty much gives the last 24 years of my life. I am a registered nurse, as you had mentioned, being that emergency department nurse in that level two trauma center, I did come across numerous victims of crime and outside of my normal nursing education that I had received, I honestly really had no idea how to properly care for these individuals. And that's when I decided, in 2009, to extend my education and focus on this specialty.

**Taylr Ucker-Lauderman**

Great, thank you, Tammy. So can you tell us a little bit about your current role, or tell the audience rather, about your current role at OAESV and what it means for the member programs of the Alliance?

**Tammy Robertson**

Sure. Well, first of all, let's kind of step back and let's talk about what a forensic nurse does, since it is a little bit still new out there to folks that are not familiarized with hospital care or law enforcement. So a forensic nurse is basically a registered nurse who has received that specialized education training to provide trauma-informed care and patient-centered care for these individuals. There's a whole lot more to forensic nurses outside of your medical care. Yes, most foremost, that is what we do, that is what we concentrate on to take care of any kind of medical issues first before moving on to the forensic world. Then we also have the opportunity to provide them with consultation testimony for civil criminal proceedings that is related to the nursing practice the care that we have given as well as the courtroom testimony. So there's a big picture outside of a registered nurse, there's a lot more in-depth training and knowledge to take care of these folks. It can be very chaotic inside of an emergency department, so those physicians do not have time, unfortunately, to be able to provide that proper care to these individuals. So that is why it is extremely important to have those forensic nurses available and trained to take care of those patients. So the role here with me currently, as a forensic nurse, I still do patient care, I still stay on a hospital rotation to be called in for that bedside nursing. The role here that I play at OAESV is a more broad area in regards to the macro level of what kind of barriers or what can we put in forth to recognize this specialty as well as standardizations for these nurses across the state?

**Laurie Hamame**

So as you've been working in this new role at OAESV, have you noticed any commonalities across Ohio in this field of forensic nursing?

**Tammy Robertson**

Yes, honestly, as we all know, there are lack of forensic nurses across the state, across the nation. However, I think we need to focus — and not just the nurses but individuals, everyone — to focus in and get the specialty out there. Forensic nursing is relatively new, it did come more into effect with policies, procedures, best practice back in 1992, through the International Association of Forensic Nursing; however, with that, the awareness has not been put out there that we are here. My goal is to have forensic nursing recognized that we are here we are best practice for these individuals, and promoting that through the hospital. What I have found in this position is even folks inside the hospital, whether they are working in cardiology, as a physician, as a nurse, as a lab tech, any professional — there aren't aware that we are here, that puts concern for me. If hospital or medical staff are unfamiliar with the work that we do, then folks out in the community are not going to know. So I have found across the state of Ohio, forensic nurses are unknown, and what we can do or what we are able to do. So getting that awareness out is crucial that we are here, we can be individualized and provide that time that those folks need after they have been victimized.

### **Taylr Ucker-Lauderman**

Thank you. Okay, so we know that across the United States, there is an extreme shortage of sexual assault nurse examiners. And if listeners are interested, there are various news stories that they can read and watch about this issue and some featuring OAESV and some that Tammy has been interviewed for. For example, we know that survivors in rural communities may travel hours to access a forensic exam after being assaulted in Ohio. So can you share how you're working to expand forensic nurse services in our state?

### **Tammy Robertson**

So we will go back to kind of what I just said, as far as awareness. I think it's extremely important when we talk about awareness that it is coming from a known forensic nurse and or a sexual assault examiner. That's huge. There's lots of information, web-based, in regards to exactly what we do. We also need to have forensic nursing added into the nursing curriculums. I was not taught anything to do with victims of crime when I attended nursing school. Right now, it is pretty much identifying in my work, what areas throughout the state of Ohio have less resources than others. Let's build those programs. We have to have a communication with not only hospitals but community partners. Within a forensic nurse world, a team really consists of, of course, your patient, but also your law enforcement, your prosecutors, your child protective services, adult advocacy centers, social workers, and advocates. So when we talk about improving or creating services, all of those folks within our forensic team need to understand that we are out there. It is relatively new, especially in the very rural areas of Ohio where they may not have many resources. This can actually not only help our patient or victim of crime, but help our community, our team. As I explain to my patients, unfortunately, a crime is like a puzzle. And there's many pieces to the puzzle to make it complete. Those pieces all have to be at the table to be able to make the best outcome for that patient. So by educating our community partners, or what we call our SART partners, meaning Sexual Assault Response Team — that includes the law enforcement, prosecutors, Child Protective Services, all of us within that room — by educating that we are there and what we do for them is crucial to be able to develop those programs or services within the hospital. Currently, there is a law out there in the Ohio Revised Code stating that a person can actually go to any emergency department and receive the services that they need. Unfortunately, as most people know, that may or may not happen, depending on the area

that you live in. Think of the most horrible thing that has just happened to you, and there's lots of things that happen within your own brain that you cannot control. So your thoughts and emotions are going every which way and then you are taken, or you go to a hospital to hear, "Well, we don't have services, you need to drive maybe one county two counties over." That is horrific for individuals all the way around. We don't say to folks who come to the emergency department who have chest pain, that "There's nothing that we can do for you here. We don't have a cath lab. So you have to go five miles away." That should not occur with victims of crime, either. So by putting that awareness out and educating that there is a law out there, and adapting those services into a hospital program is the best outcome. I will say some nurses that are aware of this specialty sometimes will shy away because they hear court, just that one word — court. Realistically, most forensic nurses do not even appear in court. One of my friends, who has been doing this for seven years has done multiple examinations and has never spent a day in court. So getting that information out to those already trained registered nurses is crucial as well.

### **Laurie Hamame**

I'm wondering — which I know it's probably complex — but is this shortage stemming more so from lack of available training or opportunities to become a forensic nurse, or is there kind of a barrier from the medical side?

### **Tammy Robertson**

Yes, yes, and yes. So when we talk about the barriers of becoming a forensic nurse, there are several, to be honest. If you are a registered nurse, for instance, in a hospital that does not have a program or sends those patients away. Unfortunately, within the medical field, victims of crime do not make money for hospitals, so they shy away from investing into that specialty. So there are some folks out there who may want to become a nurse, but unfortunately, they may not be able to afford the training. There's lack of funding for forensic nursing. Keep in mind what forensic nurses do. It's not only at the time with that patient, but it can be also the time after the patient, reviewing that photo documentation, reviewing that written documentation, preparing for court, going to court, sitting at the courthouse for two days waiting for yourself to be able to get in there. There's also those issues in regards to training. Training is challenging. There needs to be a didactic portion for both age groups of adolescents, adults as well as pediatrics. Again, they sometimes will not get paid for it, they'll do it on their own, or they may not even be able to find the training that is out there available. That's one thing that OAESV and myself, we are trying to make that more accessible for nurses to be able to find and complete. Right now, there is a didactic portion that is web-based through the International Association of Forensic Nurses that is an option. But with that comes the clinical part; it is essential for nurses to find that training that provides both. Now if you're a nurse within a hospital that already has a running forensic program, the clinical part can be very easy because there is that manager or those tendered forensic nurses that can help precept those in the clinical area. However, if you're a nurse who is not tied on to that hospital that has a program, now we have an issue in regards to where do you get that clinical experience? So that has actually been one huge barrier. Since I've been around since '99, I will say that I have been in connection with one of my former forensic nurses from back in the day who has now created a, as I say, start-to-finish training for forensic nurses through the Ohio State University, which is phenomenal. So how can we make this flourish even more across the state? And what I would like to see is standardization across the state. We still have work that we need to do to make that happen. With training being the number one, as well as the awareness, I would say those are the top

two. As forensic nurses, we need help with that. I need folks to use their voice — use their voice within their colleges, within their own work field — whether you are actually working within a sexual violence arena, or maybe you're the mailman. I need everybody to use their voice, not only to the community, but to legislation. By using your voice, that is how we are going to spread forensic nursing for those patients to get the best care that they need.

### **Taylr Ucker-Lauderman**

Thank you. I'm, just like, processing still what you were saying. Great. Tammy, can you give us a list of some of the wins or successes you've had in your position here at OAESV thus far?

### **Tammy Robertson**

Absolutely. Let me step back. Remember, I'm a forensic nurse out of a level two trauma center. So folks within your hospital don't even know what a forensic nurse does. So those barriers as that manager trying to go to the hospital admin to say, "Hey, I need a, b, and c." But I couldn't just do that. I had to go back through from the beginning of what a forensic nurse is all the way up to ask that one little question that I might need some clothing for my department. The win-win here at OAESV is everybody on our team understands sexual violence and victimization. That to me, personally, is fantastic. I can have a conversation with anyone throughout the organization and not have to give a history. OAESV is involved with what we call SAABO. And SAABO stands for the Sexual Assault Advisory Board of Ohio. That means that several multidisciplinary folks and professionals come to a table to discuss the best practices and standardization of care to our patients. And that is the purpose, to create what we call a protocol for the state of Ohio. So being a part of that is a multidisciplinary approach to taking care of a victim of crime. Last year in 2022, there was a new protocol that did come out through the Ohio Department of Health. With that, we know that there are always new things coming and new scientific evidence that has been out. So we are now still at the table and it will be a rolling effort to continue to keep that protocol that we have for Ohio up to date. We rolled out a pediatric protocol as well as an adult adolescent protocol. So the purpose of that protocol is so any medical professional can pick that protocol up and give the best care to that victim of crime. So that protocol will go over many, many different areas that could potentially come up during that care. Another accomplishment that we have in process is that I now had the opportunity to hear throughout the state different positive as well as barriers that they may have with the medical field. By taking all of that in and separating it all out, I will say that I have had the opportunity of implementing a program in southeastern Ohio; it is still in process in regards to a forensic program at that hospital. And how did that really kind of come about is folks reaching out and having those discussions of how can we do things better in my community, and being a part of all of those connections helped me realize what we needed. And that's obviously those services. So the folks that have reached out or may be having problems with a current program and lack of communication, please, I encourage anyone to reach out to me so that we can find a solution to the potential either issue or praise what we do. In the medical world, it is always negative, it seems like since I have been a nurse, and to hear those positive — not even necessarily the outcomes, but those positives — of thank you for being here, it makes doing that job much, much better. So I'm so excited that being a part of OAESV, I've had that opportunity outside of my own community to help those folks in those rural areas to make their sexual response team complete. And that's what we're usually missing is the medical piece. So I would say that I'm super excited to have yet another program within a

hospital-based organization being developed and having that service for those patients within that community.

**Laurie Hamame**

Thank you, Tammy. We at OAESV are so grateful to have someone like you with so many years of experience under your belt and a true passion for this work and for the survivors you work with. I know our member programs are grateful that there's someone they can go to for questions about developing a forensic nursing program or combating those barriers with their hospital systems. So if you wouldn't mind sharing your email address or the best way folks can contact you.

**Tammy Robertson**

Absolutely. I welcome anyone, even to provide positive feedback. That is great. So my email address would be trobertson@oaesv.org. Or you're more than welcome to call my work phone. My number is 216-559-0215. And I want to thank you, thank you, thank you for inviting me here. This is great to talk about and to push that education and awareness out to all communities of Ohio.

**Laurie Hamame**

Wonderful. I will also include your email and phone number in the show notes. I hope that you feel very, very celebrated this Forensic Nursing Week because we certainly celebrate you, Tammy,

**Tammy Robertson**

Thank you so, so much. I appreciate you and everybody else.

**Laurie Hamame**

Thank you. Bye.

**Tammy Robertson**

Bye.

**Taylr Ucker-Lauderman**

Bye, Tammy. Thank you so much.

**Laurie Hamame**

Thanks for listening to Teal Talk. We hope you enjoyed our deep dive into intersectional issues affecting survivors in Ohio. If you like what you heard, subscribe, and leave us a five-star rating and review, recommend us to a friend, and follow us on Instagram and Facebook at @OAESV and Twitter at @OhioAllianceESV. If you'd like to learn more about us and the services we offer, sign up for our email list, or read a transcript of this episode, visit [oaesv.org](https://oaesv.org)

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during regular business hours, or the Ohio Sexual Violence Helpline 24/7 at 844.644.6435 See you next time.