



*It Happened to Alexa*

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## ***NEWS***

**For Immediate Release**

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## **GRANT AWARDED TO IT HAPPENED TO ALEXA TO AID ECMC SEXUAL ASSAULT NURSE EXAMINERS IN EVIDENCE COLLECTION AND VICTIM RECOVERY**

**BUFFALO, NEW YORK**—It Happened to Alexa officials recently received word that a grant application from the Garman Family Foundation administered by the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo in the amount of \$15,000.00 was approved. The funds will aid in the collaborative effort between It Happened to Alexa (IHTA) and the Erie County Medical Center (ECMC) Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (S.A.N.E.) response team to help victims of sexual assault recover and ensure improved collection of evidence for prosecution of perpetrators of these violent acts.

IHTA and the SANE nurse team at ECMC have nearly overlapping concerns and goals to help victims of sexual assault throughout their recovery and trial process to ensure a victim's testimony can be heard at court to increase conviction rates and length of sentences to remove perpetrators from the general population and prevent potential future assaults by these offenders.

IHTA applied for the funds to purchase a colposcope, a digital hand-held camera, and corresponding equipment, as well as books and resources dedicated to the recovery of sexual assault victims. The grant funding timeline began on June 1, 2018. All equipment and books funded by this grant will be able to be purchased within the next month and will be put to use as soon as the items are received.

**It Happened to Alexa Executive Director Kate J. Fowler, PhD, said,** "We are grateful to the Garman Family Foundation for awarding this grant. The positive impact the latest equipment and resources can have on sexual assault victims cannot be understated. After an assault, the victim must navigate through a variety of emotions and challenges, often without someone who truly understands the trauma she endured. By providing each victim with tools and resources to aid in the recovery process, it can help to make an already difficult process easier to navigate. The advanced camera equipment will better enable documentation and minimize further stress on victims."

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**ECMC Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Response Team Coordinator and Clinical Nurse Specialist Karen M. Beckman-Pilcher, MSN, RN, NYS-DOH-SAFE, SANE-A, said,** “Each person involved in this project has the direct experience of working with victims and often sees and hears firsthand the horror of sexual assault. These experiences have made this team committed to finding new solutions to help victims through this trauma, whether it is providing new clothes in which to leave the hospital, resources to aid recovery, or modern equipment that can take high-resolution photographs without additional humiliation or trauma for the patient.”

**ECMC Patient Safety Investigations Coordinator Mary Molly Shea, RN, MSN, SANE, DDI, said,** “SANE nurse testimony has shown to have direct correlation to higher conviction rates within Erie County. We believe this new camera coupled with SANE nurse testimony will have even more of a direct impact on conviction rates of perpetrators. We expect that the books and resources will aid in the emotional recovery as these patients move from victim to survivor.”

The addition of the colposcope in the SANE examination room within the ECMC emergency department is expected to be invaluable for photographic documentation purposes as part of the extensive physical exam process conducted by the SANE nurses. Due to the intimate nature and brutality of sexual assault and traumatic injuries, pictures of injuries to private bodily areas must be taken. The court routinely requests such images during the trial process. Dye can be added to the non-intact tissue to create images of the injuries that are easy for jurors to view and distinguish during trial. These images can prove to be instrumental in conviction rates. When using a standard digital camera, the camera must be very close to the injury on the body to be able to accurately document the severity of the injury. Having a camera and the SANE nurse very close to the sensitive parts of the body, especially after such a horrific trauma, can re-traumatize the victim. The colposcope/camera, with its specialized zooming lenses and related equipment, enables capture of minute detail from a greater distance away from the victim than is necessary with a typical digital camera. The colposcope camera/equipment lessens any further invasion of privacy.

Up to 400 books and other printed materials that list local resources and information will be divided between IHTA and the ECMC SANE team, as both agencies come in contact with victims during especially vulnerable time periods and when victims are most in need of support and information. One of the books identified for victims is entitled “The Rape Recovery Handbook” and walks victims step by step through the trauma recovery process.

With almost 300 reported assaults annually within the City of Buffalo and surrounding suburbs, nearly one reported rape occurs each day of the year.

Dr. Kate Fowler became Executive Director of IHTA in October 2016 and has extensively studied policies and gaps in services that often negatively impact women’s ability to access education, healthcare, and upward mobility. Erie County Medical Center’s Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners response team is directed by Karen M. Beckman-Pilcher, MSN, RN, NYS-DOH-SAFE, SANE-A. Mary Molly Shea, MSN, SANE, is ECMC’s Patient Safety Investigation Coordinator. Karen Beckman-Pilcher and Mary Molly Shea have prolonged careers at ECMC having combined about 25 years of experience as sexual assault nurse examiners working within ECMC’s Level 1 Adult Trauma Center/Emergency Department, ensuring a comprehensive and skilled sexual assault response team at ECMC.

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**ABOUT THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FOR GREATER BUFFALO:** The Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, a 501(c)(3) organization, was established in 1919 to enhance and encourage long-term philanthropy in the Western New York community. The Community Foundation's mission is: Connecting people, ideas and resources to improve lives in Western New York. For nearly 100 years, the Community Foundation has made the most of the generosity of individuals, families, foundations and organizations who entrust charitable assets to the Community Foundation's care.

[www.cdgb.org](http://www.cdgb.org)

**ABOUT IT HAPPENED TO ALEXA:** The mission of *It Happened to Alexa* is to empower survivors of rape and sexual assault and to facilitate the prosecution of their offenders by providing financial, emotional, and advocacy assistance to the survivors and their supporters at the time of trial. <http://www.ithappenedtoalexa.org/>

**ABOUT THE ERIE COUNTY MEDICAL CENTER (ECMC) CORPORATION:** The ECMC Corporation was established as a New York State Public Benefit Corporation and since 2004 has included an advanced academic medical center with 593 inpatient beds, on- and off-campus health centers, more than 30 outpatient specialty care services and Terrace View, a 390-bed long-term care facility. ECMC is Western New York's only Level 1 Adult Trauma Center, as well as a regional center for burn care, behavioral health services, transplantation, medical oncology and head & neck cancer care, rehabilitation and a major teaching facility for the University at Buffalo. Most ECMC physicians, dentists and pharmacists are dedicated faculty members of the university and/or members of a private practice plan. More Western New York residents are choosing ECMC for exceptional patient care and patient experiences – *the difference between healthcare and true care*™. [www.ecmc.edu](http://www.ecmc.edu)