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### **Coalition Says NC Hospitals Should Provide Compassionate Care to Rape Victims**

**Raleigh**-Today NC Women United released the results of a survey intended to determine if North Carolina hospital emergency departments provide pregnancy prevention care on site to sexual assault survivors when they report to the hospital after the alleged crime has occurred. Representatives from NC Women United said that the group has been working in coalition with member organization NC Coalition Against Sexual Assault since last summer in an effort to ensure that every sexual assault survivor receives medically appropriate emergency care.

**NC Women United President, Paige Johnson**, announced that survey results show the majority of emergency departments across the state are considered “model hospitals.” **“By model hospital we mean that a hospital provides compassionate care to rape survivors by offering emergency contraception on site to prevent a pregnancy from occurring as a result of the rape.”**

Emergency contraception, approved as birth control by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in 1998, contains a high dose of progestin, the same hormone found in conventional birth control pills. It works in preventing a pregnancy from occurring by delaying ovulation or preventing the sperm and ovum from joining. If taken within 72 hours of unprotected intercourse, emergency contraception can reduce the rate of pregnancy by up to 89%. It has been proven safe and will not harm an existing pregnancy.

Last fall NC Women United sent a survey to every hospital in the state with an emergency department. One hundred and two of the 115 hospitals contacted completed the survey. Of those, sixty-two percent said that it is standard policy, without exceptions, to dispense emergency contraception on site to rape survivors. The group noted that several hospitals deserve credit for ensuring that rape survivors receive high quality care even though they do not provide on site treatment. The Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Asheville, for instance, stabilizes the sexually assault survivor and then transfers her to nearby Mission Hospital which provides pregnancy prevention care.

**North Carolina Coalition Against Sexual Assault Executive Director Monika Johnson Hostler** said that rape crisis programs across the state provide counseling to over 7000 victims of sexual assault each year. In explaining why emergency contraception for sexual assault survivors is compassionate care, **Ms. Johnson Hostler said, “In the midst of trauma and chaos after a rape, the victim is most concerned about pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.”**

While the group said that they were pleased with the number of model hospitals across the state, they emphasized that their long term goal is to ensure that every sexual assault survivor receives the same level of quality care from every hospital in North Carolina. **Ms. Johnson added, “We should expect every hospital to provide compassionate care to sexual assault survivors on site and that includes emergency contraception. A woman who has been raped shouldn’t have to go through the additional agony of facing an unwanted pregnancy.”**

In practice, there is no statewide protocol for rape victims in North Carolina. In lieu of a state policy, emergency physicians generally rely on protocol established by the **American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP)**, which includes pregnancy prophylaxis as standard treatment for sexual assault survivors. The College’s protocol specifies that if the particular doctor or hospital has an existing policy against birth control that the rape victim will be referred to a provider who will provide emergency contraception.

In North Carolina, at least nine hospitals admitted to having policies in place that allow doctors to deny rape victims pregnancy prevention care. Other hospitals surveyed indicated that they refer rape victims to another

provider for care. Emergency contraception is a time sensitive form of birth control which means that the earlier it is taken after unprotected intercourse the more effective it is in preventing pregnancy.

In order to help advocates across the state better understand what is available in their communities, NC Women United has created a **web-site that allows visitors to click on their county in order to find out if hospitals in their area provide compassionate care to rape victims ([www.ncwu.org/2004/ecer](http://www.ncwu.org/2004/ecer))**. **NC Women United member organizations that took the lead in conducting this survey include: NARAL Pro-Choice North Carolina, NC Coalition Against Sexual Assault and Planned Parenthood of Central North Carolina.** NC Women United is a coalition of forty organizations working to improve the lives of women in North Carolina through grassroots activism, community organizing, advocacy, and engagement in the political process.

**Ms. Johnson added, “The purpose of our web-site is to help ordinary people across the state become advocates for sexual assault victims in their communities.”**

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