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**MAYOR BLOOMBERG ANNOUNCES EXPANSION OF
SEXUAL ASSAULT RESPONSE TEAM PROGRAM TO PUBLIC
HOSPITALS IN MANHATTAN AND QUEENS, FULFILLING
PROMISE TO BRING STATE-OF-THE-ART FORENSIC AND
COUNSELING SERVICES TO SEXUAL ASSAULT VICTIMS AT
ALL PUBLIC HOSPITALS**

***Success of Bronx and Brooklyn SART Programs Leads to Full Citywide
Expansion***

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg today announced the expansion of the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) program to all public hospitals in New York City with the addition of five City hospitals in the boroughs of Manhattan and Queens. This announcement comes one year after the successful expansion of the initiative into Brooklyn and two years after the cutting-edge program was launched in the Bronx. SARTs are composed of specially-trained forensic examiners and rape crisis counselors who provide sexual assault victims with state-of-the-art forensic and counseling services within one hour of their arrival at the hospital. The SART program has now been fully implemented at Metropolitan Hospital Center, Harlem Hospital Center and Bellevue Hospital Center in Manhattan and Elmhurst Hospital Center and Queens Hospital Center in Queens. SART services are available 24-hours a day, seven days a week. Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly, Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown, Chief of the Manhattan District Attorney's Sex Crimes Unit Lisa Friel, Criminal Justice Coordinator John Feinblatt and HHC President Alan D. Aviles joined Mayor Bloomberg for the announcement at Elmhurst Hospital Center in Queens.

“The SART program has proven to be a valuable and effective model for delivering services to sexual assault victims and bringing the criminals who perpetrate these terrible crimes to justice,” said Mayor Bloomberg.

“Today, rape victims who seek help at any City hospital – whether it’s in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens or Manhattan – receive the best possible medical, counseling and forensic services, and they receive this attention and care within an hour.”

The Bronx and Brooklyn programs have proven successful at minimizing trauma to the victim and reducing the risk that critical evidence will be lost, damaged or overlooked. Since it began operating in April of 2004, the Bronx SART has produced impressive results. Through the end of February, 413 sexual assault victims were treated at Bronx public hospitals by SART examiners. Of those victims, 95% were examined within one hour of their arrival, compared to only 63% in 2003, before the SART program began. In addition, 87% of victims were examined

for evidence of microscopic genital injury using a device called a colposcope, compared to only 27% in 2003.

The use of this device led to the documenting of genital injuries in 55% of the cases, compared to 28% in 2003. Non-genital injuries were also documented in 56% of the cases, compared to 45% in 2003. Finally, 37% of rape kits collected from SART hospitals yielded viable DNA profiles, compared to 33% at other Bronx hospitals over the same time period. Nearly 63% of the rape kits collected in SART hospitals were positive for DNA, compared to only 46% in non-SART hospitals.

The results of the expansion to Brooklyn are equally impressive. Nearly 190 victims were treated in the first year of the program. Of those victims, 94% were examined within an hour, compared to only 78% in 2004, and 90% consented to have their rape kits released to law enforcement.

Finally, 88% were examined with a colposcope, compared to 29% in 2004. Genital injuries were documented in 35% of these cases, compared to 21% in 2004. Non-genital injuries were documented in 36% of the cases, compared to 24% in 2004.

Prior to the implementation of the SART program, every rape victim who sought treatment at a City hospital received a forensic examination designed to collect physical evidence for use in criminal investigations and prosecutions. However, not all victims were examined by dedicated, specially-trained Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners (SAFEs), and many were not examined within one hour of their arrival. The longer the wait, the more difficult the experience for the victim, and the more likely that valuable physical evidence – and the victim’s willingness to cooperate with law enforcement – will be lost. The SART program directly addressed these problems by creating a team of SAFEs dedicated specifically to providing high-quality forensic examinations and counseling services to every sexual assault victim within one hour of their arrival.

All SART members have received intensive training, approved by the State Department of Health, which includes properly identifying, collecting, and packaging forensic evidence, accurately documenting injuries, and attending to the emotional needs of rape victims. Coordinated by a project director, SART members are dispatched around the clock to conduct thorough physical examinations, collect potential DNA evidence, and document both internal and external injuries. Just as importantly, SAFEs are accompanied by volunteer rape crisis counselors who provide victims with emotional support and refer them to appropriate counseling and social services.

The Manhattan and Queens SARTs will be based upon the same model as their predecessors. The team will consist of 15 to 20 SAFE examiners, operating under the direction of a project coordinator. Team members will respond within one hour to every sexual assault victim who arrives at Metropolitan Hospital Center, Harlem Hospital Center and Bellevue Hospital Center in Manhattan and Elmhurst Hospital Center and Queens Hospital Center in Queens and will be accompanied by volunteer rape crisis counselors. As with the Bronx and Brooklyn SARTs, members of the Manhattan and Queens SARTs will also be available to testify as expert

witnesses in criminal prosecutions involving their patients. In order to enhance the effectiveness of their testimony, team members will undergo an intensive training program designed and implemented by both the Manhattan District Attorney's and Queens District Attorney's offices. Training will focus on clearly articulating the basics of the forensic examinations and the nature and significance of the physical evidence discovered.

"Women have been more willing to come forward to report rapes without the stigma that once attached to identifying an acquaintance or even a spouse as the assailant," said Commissioner Kelly. "The SART program reinforces victim confidence by providing expert medical attention and police investigative techniques so that the victim is treated with care, the evidence is preserved, and the assailant is identified and prosecuted."

"The expansion of Sexual Assault Response Team programs to the public hospitals in Manhattan is an important step forward," said Manhattan District Attorney Morgenthau. "The Manhattan District Attorney's Office has been active in training members of hospital response teams; we know from long experience that these heinous crimes have a devastating impact on victims, both physically and psychologically. Expanding the SART program will help bring prompt, sensitive and expert care to sexual assault victims throughout the city and will greatly assist law enforcement in bringing their attackers to justice."

"The expansion of the Sexual Assault Response Team initiative to Queens County will enhance immeasurably our ability to effectively investigate and successfully prosecute our sexual assault cases and bring the dangerous predators who commit these horrendous crimes to justice," said District Attorney Brown. "The SART teams of specially-trained health care professionals ensure compassionate quality health care for sexual assault victims and provide the forensic evidence needed for prosecution. I applaud the Mayor for bringing the SART program to Queens County."

"In the hours after a rape victim shows up at one of our hospitals, we have a narrow window of opportunity to accomplish three critical goals," said Criminal Justice Coordinator John Feinblatt. "We can minimize her trauma and connect her to the services she needs to recover; we can secure her cooperation by explaining the process and treating her with compassion and respect; and we can collect and document valuable forensic evidence. The Bronx and Brooklyn SARTs have proven to be a successful model for accomplishing all three of these goals and we expect the same success in Manhattan and Queens."

"Partnering with the police and district attorneys in every borough helps us further build on the comprehensive services New York City public hospitals provide to nearly 1,000 rape and sexual assault victims every year," said HHC President Aviles. "Our medical approach extends to advocacy, social services, psychological counseling and assistance with filing criminal charges against the perpetrator. Our highly specialized health care professionals run a center of excellence program that is built on quality and compassion, guaranteeing that all victims of this traumatic crime are treated quickly and respectfully and are all cared for in a comforting, safe environment."

“The Office of Chief Medical Examiner is delighted to see the expansion of SART, and we remain committed to providing state of the art laboratory services in the interest of criminal justice,” said Dr. Hirsch.

The Manhattan and Queens SART programs are funded entirely by the City and have been fully operational since March 31. It is estimated that the teams will provide services to approximately 250 sexual assault victims each during their first year of operation. Citywide, more than half of all rape complainants seek treatment at HHC hospitals.

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