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NEWS RELEASE

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New Strategies Unveiled in Fight Against Domestic Violence Strangulations

PHOENIX, AZ (June 8, 2012) – A new approach to investigating cases of alleged strangulation in Maricopa County promises to greatly improve the ability to hold perpetrators accountable, according to the results of a pilot program released today. Developed by a partnership of local law enforcement agencies, Scottsdale Healthcare and the County Attorney’s Office, the program establishes more reliable methods of obtaining the necessary corroborating medical documentation and evidence that is frequently difficult to obtain in strangulation incidents. In the recently completed pilot study, the number of submitted cases that were ultimately prosecuted jumped from 14% to more than 60%, thanks to the use of new tools and techniques for investigating strangulation allegations.

“Our partnership with police agencies and Scottsdale Healthcare has demonstrated an effective model for providing medical-forensic exams that includes documenting and gathering the independent forensic evidence we need to effectively prove and prosecute allegations of strangulation,” remarked Maricopa County Attorney Bill Montgomery. “I am convinced that we will see great strides in our ability to hold stranglers accountable for an offense that all too often is a precursor to more serious violence,” he added.

Studies show as many as half of all female domestic violence victims experience strangulation in their lifetimes, making them seven times more likely to become homicide victims. One-quarter of all females murdered by men are killed by strangulation or smothering. Yet despite being a strong predictor of future violence, strangulation allegations are frequently difficult to prove due to the lack of visible corroborating evidence, the reluctance of some victims to testify, and the “he said – she said” nature of many domestic disputes.

The Domestic Violence Strangulation Project was launched in December, 2011 by the County Attorney’s Office, Scottsdale Healthcare, and the Glendale and Chandler Police departments to address these challenges with a multi-disciplinary team response.

Under an agreement expected to soon roll out County-wide, police and first responders will transport domestic violence victims to hospitals and family advocacy centers throughout Maricopa County where Forensic Nurse Examiners from Scottsdale Healthcare will respond 24/7 to perform specialized medical-forensic examinations and collect evidence including advanced photographic documentation, DNA and other physical evidence. Nurse Examiners will also provide fact and expert witness testimony in court, allowing certain cases to proceed

even if the victim is unwilling or unable to testify. The agreement also calls for law enforcement officers to receive training on how to recognize and respond to strangulation incidents.

Jerry Zabokrtsky, Director of Scottsdale Healthcare (SHC) Forensic Nurses related; "SHC Forensic Nurses are compassionate and caring Registered Nurses who provide world-class patient care first and foremost. They also have special knowledge and training in caring for this specialized population, including injury identification and documentation, along with DNA collection. Additionally, they are all well versed in court testimony and the legal system. As professional nurses their medical testimony can be instrumental in the outcome of many cases."

"Being able to collaborate with the Maricopa County Attorney's Office and local law enforcement agencies by performing domestic violence and strangulation exams is an honor and a privilege and will enhance the care given to victims of domestic violence and serve the community in a greater capacity," remarked Scottsdale Healthcare Forensic Nurse Examiner Erin Bertino. "As a forensic nurse examiner, I am on the front lines of educating people about the dangers of strangulation and take this role very seriously."

A review of cases involving allegations of strangulation submitted to the County Attorney's Office over a six month period in 2011 revealed that 90% were turned down for prosecution due to lack of corroboration. By contrast, more than 60% of submittals were filed for prosecution during the recently completed three month pilot program using written reports, photographs and other evidence collected by Scottsdale Healthcare's Forensic Nurse Examiners.

Domestic violence incidents account for the single largest category of service calls to police agencies. In Maricopa County last year, more than 1,500 domestic violence calls for police service involved allegations of strangulation. Projections based on the pilot study indicate prosecutors could file more than 500 additional strangulation cases once the new program is implemented throughout Maricopa County.

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