

## SEXUAL ASSAULT WHILST SERVING: COMMISSIONING A FORENSIC NURSE ADVISOR (MILITARY) AS PART OF THE REGIONAL SEXUAL ASSAULT REFERRAL CENTRE (SARC) SERVICE



### ACKNOWLEDGING THE EVIDENCE

Evidence from the military is conclusive in acknowledging that sexual offenses are under-reported and that personnel are less likely to report inappropriate behaviors if they are not clear about what it is, where to 'draw the line', how to raise concerns or what raising a concern will entail (Wigston, 2019).

The Defence Sub-Committee on Women in the Armed Forces 2021 report Protecting Those Who Protect Us: Women in the Armed Forces from Recruitment to Civilian Life, 64 percent of female veterans and 58 percent of currently serving women reported experiencing bullying, harassment, discrimination and sexual behavior's during their careers. Furthermore, around one in six service women and veterans did not report their experience.



### METHOD

Creation of an Initial Management Pathway for Sexual Assault for Commanders to highlight the referral pathway for sexual offences and a Rape and Sexual Assault Initial Disclosure Checklist to ensure that any initial statements given to Commanders do not result in tainted evidence for any possible criminal prosecution.

Commissioning of The Forensic Nurse Advisor (Military) is key to ensuring that this work continues by supporting and leading training, for serving personnel and key supporting agencies, raising awareness of SARCs with all military personnel and supporting any member of the military community who experiences rape or sexual assault.

### PROJECT AIMS

This project aimed to address the under-reporting of sexual offences in the military by raising awareness, improving pathways between the military and the NHS commissioned Sexual Assault and Referral Centres (SARC) and providing training on sexual offences.

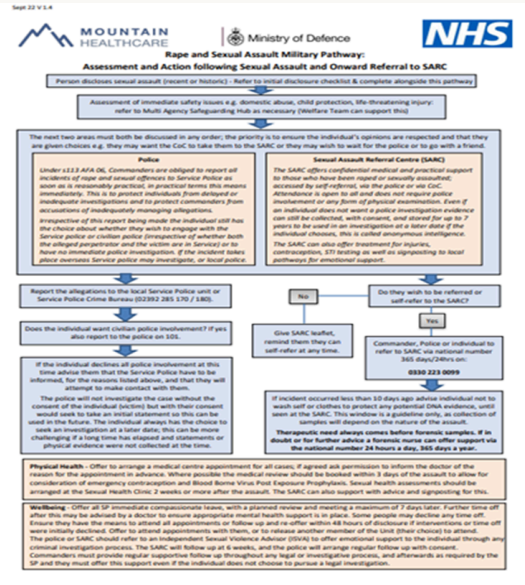
To create an NHS commissioned role, Forensic Nurse Advisor for Sexual Assault (Military), to be the Single Point of Contact. The role will ensure that military survivors will receive equivalent healthcare to the wider community in relation to sexual offences. In addition the role will ensure that Commanding Officers understand the referral process to the Defence Serious Crime Unit and the SARC service.



### IMPACT

One of the most critical indicators of the Initial disclosure pathway and FNA's impact is the significant increase in the reporting of sexual assault cases within the military community. Historically, underreporting has been a major challenge due to stigma, fear of retribution, and lack of trust in the system. However, the presence of the FNA has fostered a safer and more supportive environment, encouraging more service members to come forward. This increase in reporting is a vital step towards addressing sexual assaults within the military.

The Forensic Nurse Advisor role is making a profound impact within the military community by improving the reporting, response, and support for patients who disclose sexual assault. Through their specialised care, clear pathways, and patient-centered approach, The FNA is proving to be crucial role in ensuring that military personnel receive the compassionate and comprehensive care they deserve.



### FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

- NHS England to commission the role as part of other regional SARC services which would enable it to be replicated across other military bases-at home and overseas
- All Defence Commanding Officers (Army, Navy, RAF) to access to face to face or remote learning in relation to best practice for managing any initial disclosures
- Continue to undertake training to Military Medical Officers to ensure best practice
- Sexual offence training videos to be mandatory in military training

This will provide equivalence in provision, for victims of rape and sexual assault in the military, compared to provision in the wider community