

# Police should consult forensic experts to increase rape convictions

**f** A leading forensic doctor has urged officers to seek advice before interviewing suspects in rape cases in a bid to improve the number of prosecutions.

Dr Cath White, clinical director at St Mary's Sexual Assault Referral Centre in Manchester, called for better communication between officers and health services.

Speaking at the conference called *Investigating Rape*, she said that the investigations could be improved if officers consulted beforehand on the kind of forensic evidence they needed to look for.

DC White said: 'A detective investigating a sexual assault against an 80-year-old woman in a nursing home, that wasn't reported until five days



Officers need to seek forensic advice

later, came to me for advice about what evidence could be gathered because he believed

the suspect would already have a good explanation for the woman's bruises. That is the only time that has happened to me, yet forensic doctors deal with hundreds of cases.

Dr White said all those involved in rape investigation and support for rape victims had to work more closely together.

'Communication is the key. We cannot work in our individual silos, because if there are gaps between the services, we are going to fail. We have to know where we are going wrong in order to put it right.'

The conference heard that 75 per cent of rape cases fail to result in a prosecution.



# Specialist police officers boost rape convictions

**f** Rape convictions have increased by a fifth in London since the introduction of specially trained sexual offences investigating teams, it has been revealed.

Det Chf Insp Dave Osborn told a conference on *Investigating Rape* that Project Sapphire, the Met's response to improving rape investigation had led to an increase in prosecutions.

DCI Osborn, who is leading the review into rape investigation commissioned by Sir Ian Blair, recently said interim results showed strong leadership to be key to successful investigations.

'This is a major crime. You need someone who is committed to understanding that this is a serious offence. You have got to have a dedicated leader.'

In a recent survey of victims, 82 per cent said they were very satisfied with the sexual offences investigation team officers. Nearly



Project Sapphire is trying to improve prosecutions

60 per cent said they waited less than half an hour for an officer to arrive after they reported the attack.

'Obviously we want to push this up to 100 per cent. Our aim is to turn victim care into a willing witness,' said DCI Osborn.

The Met has teamed up with the charity, Voice UK, to develop a

course in how to interview rape victims with learning difficulties. The training forms part of the Met's advanced course offered to SOITs officers after a year in the role.

Project Sapphire has also had a 100 per cent success rate in cold case reviews of rapes.



# Rape victims 'put off' reporting by untrained staff

Poorly trained front line police officers and staff are deterring rape victims from reporting the crime to the police.

Yvonne Traynor, service director for the UK's largest sexual abuse support centre, said that unskilled front counter staff put victims off.

'A raised eyebrow, a sigh or unreturned phone call is all it takes for a woman to blame herself. What they need is patience, understanding, empathy and unconditional respect.'

She called for much greater 'training and awareness' among officers and police staff.

Martin Sullivan, from Survivors UK which supports male rape victims, said the gay community's mistrust of the police based on 'past experience' also prevented them from reporting male rapes.

He said gay and heterosexual men did not feel they would be 'taken seriously' when they reported the crime to front counter staff at their local police station.

Det Chf Insp Dave Osborn, who heads Project Sapphire, said the Met ran training courses for front counter staff and frontline officers in how to deal with victims.

John Yates, ACPO lead on rape and deputy assistant commissioner at the Met, said victim care was the 'biggest single factor' to improving rape investigations.

He told the conference: 'We know that if a woman makes an immediate complaint following the attack, there is a 73 per cent chance of a conviction. But if they don't think they are going to be believed and receive a professional and sympathetic response there will be delays in coming forward.'