

Implementing a Universal Help Sign for Vulnerable Populations

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INTRODUCTION

Background

Human trafficking is a worldwide issue. Many victims present to an Emergency Department (ED) for care during their time of exploitation, but go unrecognized. In many cases, trafficked individuals are fearful of retribution from their traffickers and are unable to ask for help due to their trafficker maintaining rigid control over all interactions with those in positions to assist. Traffickers do not leave their victims unattended while receiving care in the ED, so sensitive topics are often not discussed or identified.

Purpose

This project aims to implement a universal hand signal to alert ED colleagues that a patient is in danger and needs help, but unable to speak freely, following the Iowa Model of Evidence-Based Practice.

Framework:

Utilizing the Iowa Model of Evidence-Based Practice, the Universal Help Sign was implemented in seven Emergency Departments in a hospital system setting. A team assessed the need for a communication tool amongst vulnerable populations who may be unable to speak freely. The intervention included multidisciplinary staff education and patient facing signage on how to utilize the Universal Help sign posted in common ED areas

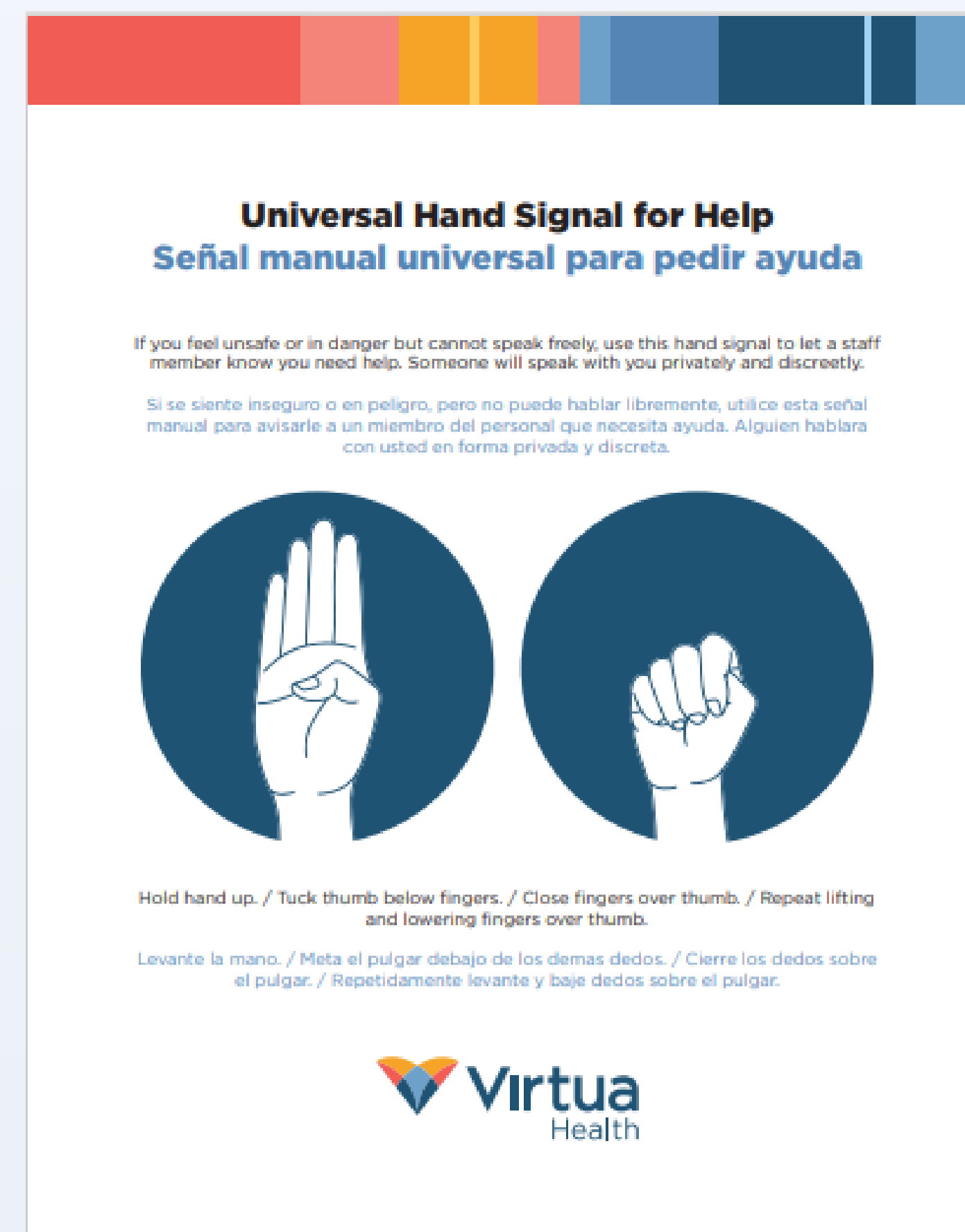
Objectives of Poster:

After viewing this poster, the learner will demonstrate the universal help signal and identify escalation plan when shown the universal help signal.

METHODS

Setting and Participants:

The Iowa Model of Evidence-Based was utilized to guide this project in a 20 bed community Emergency Department in an underserved area. The Shared Governance Team identified the need for a communication tool for patients unable to speak freely. They began by involving key stakeholders in the ED. They appraised and synthesized supporting evidence. In addition, the project was presented to the Risk and Quality Departments for vetting and the signage was created collaboratively with the marketing department. The signage contains written instruction and a picture on how signal and is posted in English and Spanish in all ED bathrooms, triage, and waiting areas in the ED. All ED clinical staff in addition to security, registration, and environmental services received education on the standard operating procedure should they recognize the signal. The education was also added to system wide human trafficking education that is completed on hire by all Virtua colleagues.

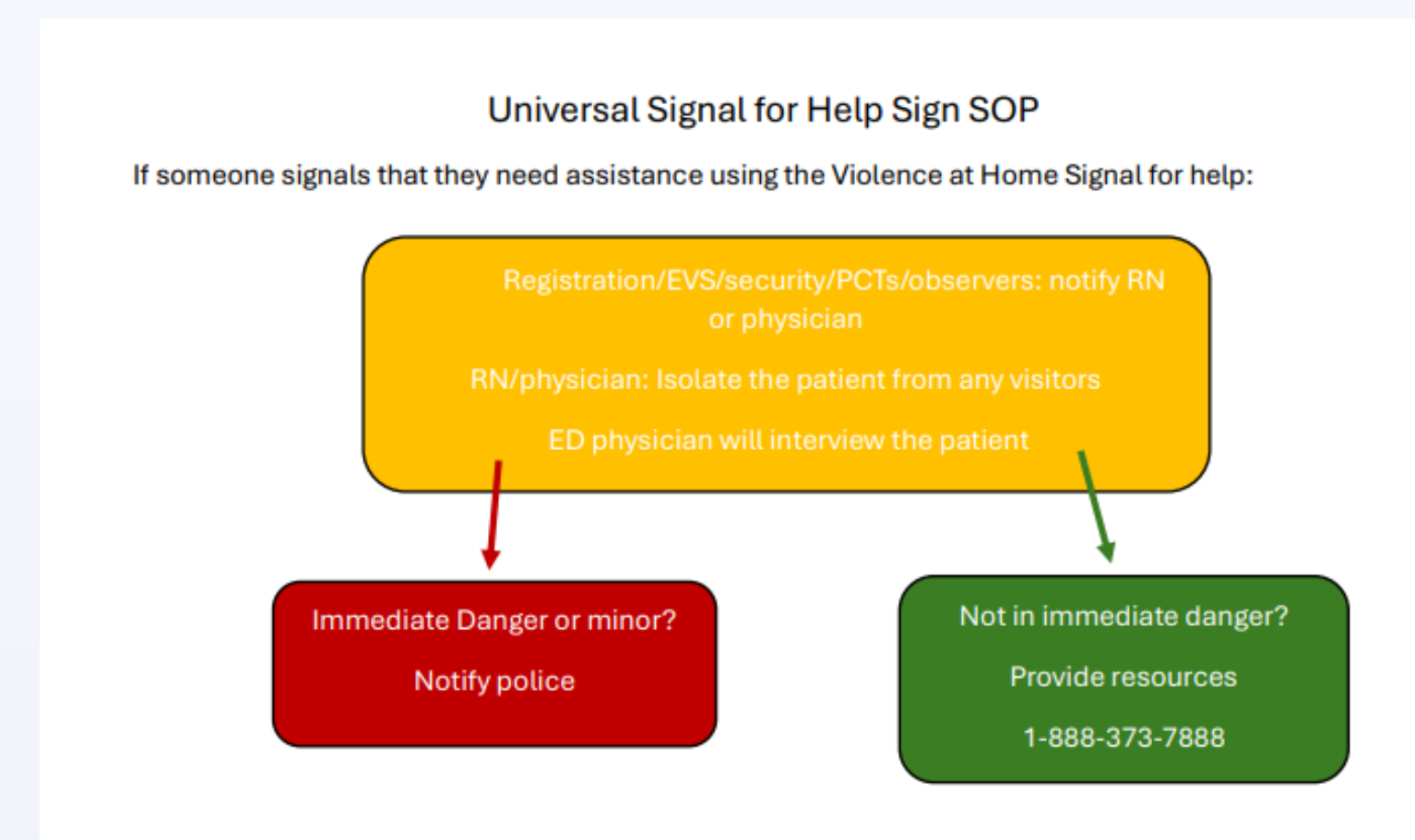


RESULTS

Key Findings:

This interprofessional project remains ongoing. Results pending. At the time of writing, the signal has not been used. The signage has been implemented in all system EDs. Education has been provided to all clinical and non-clinical colleagues

Visuals:



CONCLUSIONS

Relevance:

In conclusion, this project provides a means of communication and a potential life-line to a vulnerable population in the ED. Over 60% of trafficked individuals seek care from a healthcare worker during their time of exploitation. (Pourmand, 2022), and many are not recognized due to patients not having the ability to alert healthcare workers they need assistance. The Universal Help Signal gives trafficked individuals a voice.

Limitations and Future Directions:

Data collection on use of the signal is a limitation. Hospitals are a critical point of contact for victims of human trafficking and domestic abuse. Healthcare facilities should invest in robust screening, identification, and resources for these vulnerable populations.

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