

WHAT IS A SANE / FORENSIC NURSE EXAMINER?

A Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE), also commonly referred to as a Forensic Nurse Examiner (FNE), is a registered nurse who has completed specialized education and clinical training to provide comprehensive, trauma-informed medical forensic care to individuals affected by violence.

While SANEs are most associated with sexual assault response, forensic nurse examiners may also provide care for patients affected by:

- Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)
- Strangulation
- Child maltreatment and abuse
- Human trafficking
- Elder abuse
- Interpersonal violence and other violent crimes

In some settings, providers may also use titles such as:

- Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner (SAFE)
- Sexual Assault Medical Forensic Examiner (SAMFE)
- Sexual Assault Examiner (SAE)

For the purpose of this guide, the term SANE/FNE encompasses all similarly trained forensic healthcare professionals.

THE ROLE OF A SANE/FNE

The SANE/FNE provides holistic, patient-centered care while recognizing both the immediate and long-term impacts of trauma and violence. Their role extends beyond evidence collection and includes comprehensive healthcare assessment, crisis intervention, education, advocacy coordination, and continuity of care planning.

A forensic nurse examiner is trained to:

- Conduct trauma-informed medical forensic examinations
- Obtain culturally sensitive and developmentally appropriate medical histories
- Assess and document injuries
- Collect and preserve forensic evidence when requested by the patient
- Provide sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing, treatment, and prevention
- Provide HIV risk assessment and prophylaxis education
- Offer pregnancy prevention options when appropriate
- Facilitate safety planning and crisis intervention
- Coordinate follow-up care and warm handoffs to community resources
- Collaborate with advocacy, healthcare, behavioral health, and legal partners
- Provide objective documentation and testimony when required in legal proceedings

The forensic nurse examiner's priority is always the health, dignity, autonomy, and informed choice of the patient.

Modern forensic nursing practice is rooted in:

- Trauma-informed care
- Evidence-based practice
- Patient autonomy
- Cultural humility
- Ethical and unbiased medical assessment

FORENSIC NURSING AS A SPECIALTY

Forensic nursing is a recognized nursing specialty by the American Nurses Association (ANA). The specialty integrates healthcare, forensic science, and the legal system to provide specialized care for patients impacted by violence, trauma, abuse, and exploitation.

Forensic nurses serve as a bridge between healthcare systems, community response agencies, and the justice system while maintaining their primary role as independent medical professionals focused on patient care and outcomes.

In addition to direct patient care, forensic nurses may participate in:

- Community education
- Prevention initiatives
- Peer review and quality assurance
- Expert consultation
- Multidisciplinary response teams (MDT/SART)
- Policy development and systems improvement

FORENSIC NURSE EXAMINER TRAINING, LICENSURE & CERTIFICATION

Forensic nurse examiners are licensed registered nurses (RNs) who complete additional specialized education and clinical training in medical forensic care.

Many nurses begin practice after completing:

- A 40-hour Adult/Adolescent SANE didactic course
- A 40-hour Pediatric SANE didactic course (optional specialty)
- A hands-on clinical skills lab - like the Adult/Adolescent Sexual Assault Nurse/Forensic Examiner (SANE/SAFE) Clinical Skills Lab through University of Idaho hosted by FERN, Inc.
- Clinical orientation, competency validation, and preceptorship are the final requirements a program such as FERN must complete before providers are approved for independent practice.

Entry-Level SANE (Registered Nurse) Training Requirements

Although requirements may vary by state or employer, common foundational preparation includes:

1. RN Licensure

Must hold an active Registered Nurse (RN) license.

2. 40-Hour Didactic Training

Completion of an approved Adult/Adolescent SANE course providing foundational forensic nursing education.

Training topics commonly include:

- Trauma-informed care
- Injury identification and documentation
- Evidence collection
- STI/HIV prophylaxis
- Courtroom testimony
- Photography
- Strangulation
- Pediatric considerations
- Patient autonomy and consent
- Multidisciplinary response systems

Current training opportunities may be offered through:

- Emergency Nurses Association (ENA)
- State SANE/SART programs
- Academic institutions
- Association of Forensic Nurses (AFN)
- Regional forensic nursing organizations

In Idaho, additional training opportunities are often supported through Idaho State Police SANE/SART initiatives and rural grant-funded workforce programs.

3. Clinical Skills Lab

Completion of hands-on competency-based training, typically involving:

- Speculum examinations
- Forensic photography
- Evidence collection techniques
- Injury identification
- Documentation practice
- Mock patient scenarios
- Courtroom preparation

FERN provides a 16-hour Clinical Skills Lab utilizing live models and experienced forensic nurse instructors to help bridge education into real-world practice.

4. Clinical Orientation & Preceptorship

New SANEs/FNEs typically complete supervised clinical experiences and competency evaluations before independently taking call.

Hands-on mentorship and case review are considered essential components of safe forensic nursing practice.

PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION

Board certification demonstrates advanced knowledge and competency within forensic nursing practice.

Current certifications may include:

- SANE-A (Adult/Adolescent)
- SANE-P (Pediatric)

Certification pathways and oversight are currently evolving nationally as forensic nursing education transitions following structural changes within prior certifying organizations.

Advanced forensic nursing opportunities may also include:

- Graduate education
- Leadership roles
- Clinical educator roles
- Research and policy work
- Advanced forensic nursing specialization

Additional specialty certifications and advanced practice pathways continue to develop as the field of forensic nursing expands nationwide.