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Research article

## Featured counter-trafficking program: H.E.A.L.T.H. Clinic of Ottawa

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### ABSTRACT

This invited article is one of several comprising part of a special issue of *Child Abuse and Neglect* focused on child trafficking and health. The purpose of each invited article is to describe a specific program serving trafficked youth. Featuring these programs is intended to raise awareness of innovative counter-trafficking strategies emerging worldwide and facilitates collaboration on program development and outcomes research. This article describes the H.E.A.L.T.H. Clinic of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, a primary health care clinic designed specifically for those who have experienced, are currently experiencing, or are at risk for sexual exploitation, coercion, or human trafficking.

### 1. Program Description

Caring for trafficking survivors, or those at risk of being trafficked, is difficult because there is limited research to support effective models of health care delivery in this realm. However, practices that have been effective in other vulnerable and marginalized populations provide a good starting point. With these emerging practices in mind, Ottawa opened its first primary health care clinic specifically designed for those affected by human trafficking; the Health Care, Education, Advocacy, Linkage for Trauma Informed Healing (HEALTH) clinic of Canada opened on February 22, 2017. H.E.A.L.T.H is a trauma-informed primary health care clinic located in the heart of Canada's capital region of Ottawa, Ontario. H.E.A.L.T.H is specifically designed for those who have experienced, are currently experiencing, or are at risk for sexual exploitation, coercion, and/or human trafficking. 2018–2019 statistics highlighted 38 unique persons meeting definition of "at risk" and 51 unique persons meeting definition of human trafficking. H.E.A.L.T.H clinic was designed with input of survivors, many of who described avoiding contact with the medical system due to multiple fears, including re-traumatization, judgement and stigma. The design of the clinic represents a significant shift in the way health care is provided to victims of crime. When considering Canada's response to the health needs of those who are trafficked, current care delivery in Canada is focused on an emergency response, emphasizes those experiencing sex trafficking (as opposed to labour trafficking) and does not allow for long term, holistic and preventative health care. In contrast, the H.E.A.L.T.H clinic vision is to provide longitudinal primary and preventative care to those at risk, those experiencing, and those who have experienced all forms of human trafficking.

At H.E.A.L.T.H., we serve all individuals aged 13 years and older and funding is provided by the Ontario Strategy to End Human Trafficking within the Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services.

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### 1.1. Program activities

Our H.E.A.L.T.H clinic offers a number of direct health care services. These include, but are not limited to, the following: Periodic Health/Physical Exams; On site Vaccinations; Medical abortion; On site STI testing and treatment ; Hep C testing and on site treatment; HIV PREP; Medication Review; Birth Control Counselling and Provision of Birth Control of Choice; Emergency Contraception (pills and Copper IUD); Hormone Therapy and referrals for Affirming Surgery. For those who qualify, access is available to Ontario's Victim Quick Response Program (VQRP) for specific needs such as long-term trauma counselling, tattoo removal, and residential treatment for substance use disorders. VQRP is accessible regardless of police involvement.

We aim to streamline the intake process so that new patients are not re-traumatized by repetitive questioning. Explanations and context to the questions asked are provided to our clients. We believe this context makes questions less invasive and drives the connections to the questions with provision of medical care. We provide significantly longer visits to allow all concerns to be adequately addressed and to provide an informed consent approach. When required, we also coordinate care with our health service community and provide "warm referrals," or in-person introductions between the patient (person) and the service provider.

No identification or insurance is required for clients. This allows for anonymity and equitable service delivery. Our funding proposal allotted a portion of the budget to cover medication and diagnostic services for those without Ontario Health Insurance Program (OHIP). H.E.A.L.T.H is accessed by appointment only and is open two days a week with evening hours on Friday. The clinic location is published and is in a secure, accessible business building within the busy downtown core of Ottawa.

A robust continuum of care is provided at H.E.A.L.T.H to overcome engagement barriers. These are tailored to the individual's stage of trafficking, stage of change and ambivalence, level of safety and stability, and degree of involvement and/or level of emotional attachment with the trafficker. The continuum of wraparound/parallel services is also dynamic and is flexible to meet the changing needs of survivors. Paramount to our service delivery is prioritizing survivor-driven treatment goals: We therefore embrace a paradigm of therapeutic change that is more iterative than linear and anticipates the possibility of re-trafficking as a part of recovery

Clients are invited to access clinic services via in-person visits or via the Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN). The Ontario Telemedicine Network provides efficient and equitable virtual care for patients. OTN maximizes access to care and minimizes travel and wait times.

The H.E.A.L.T.H clinic employs a small team and is led by a Nurse Practitioner (NP). Our small team includes the following: Reception (filled by a nursing student), a Nurse Practitioner, and a team of experiential peer support.

Nurse Practitioners (NPs) are unique health-care professionals with graduate education and clinical practice experience. NP's have education in both nursing theory and medical skills and possess the knowledge and skills to autonomously diagnose, order and interpret diagnostic tests, prescribe treatment and perform specific procedures (CNA, 2016, P.1). A large component of the NP practice includes health promotion and prevention of disease and illness through health teaching, counselling, and screening of patients. NPs are comprehensive and holistic; their focus is on treating the whole person and improving health outcomes.

The Nurse Practitioner who leads H.E.A.L.T.H has extensive training in trauma and has worked in the field of violence against women for greater than 15 years.

A diversifying component of our clinic is that survivors work as an integrated member of the health care team in paid peer support roles. At every visit, a peer member is present to support the client and assist with ensuring that the clinic is accessible.

## 2. Criteria for referral

To ensure proper clients are referred to H.E.A.L.T.H the following referral criteria is followed. For clients who are **at risk**, we accept people age 13 years and older of any, ability, race, ethnicity, gender or socio economic status who experience having to trade sex for a place to sleep, food, or drugs (illicit or prescription). We accept "high risk" youth and adolescents within the Children's Aid Society (CAS) system: in particular, those who frequently run away and have a history of child sex abuse, struggle with substance and/or mental health issues. We accept and are sensitive to our trans and LGBTQ + population. For clients at risk for labour trafficking referral further includes persons who are in Canada without documentation and who are looking to work (child workers, minorities, migrant workers). For clients age 13 years and older of any ability, race, ethnicity gender, or socio economic status who identifying as being trafficked or who have been trafficked in their lifetime, these referrals are also accepted.

## 3. Strengths and challenges

In the time that H.E.A.L.T.H. has been open, there have been many successes. Although we have not yet conducted a formal on-site evaluation, client feedback has been positive, we have experienced a high rate of return visits, a low no show rate and many clients have referred their peers to our clinic.

Current statistics for the 2018–2019 fiscal year of the H.E.A.L.T.H program are as follows: Total initial visits (89); Total follow up visits (214); Total Clinic visits are 303 of the 96 days the clinic was open for care delivery. Total "At Risk" (38) with total meeting definition of trafficking (51). The age of clients who have accessed HEALTH are the following: 0–17 years (28); 18–24 years (19); 25–34 years (21); 35–64 years (19) 65+ (2). Gender identified at time of intake is as follows: Men (14); Women (70), Trans 4; Non Binary 1.

#### 4. Strengths

Strengths of H.E.A.L.T.H model include the following: Clinic setting is Nurse Practitioner lead in a central location fully accessible by public transportation with on site peer support. H.E.A.L.T.H has increased accessibility with the Ontario Teleconference Network and clinic hours offset regular hours of service being open weekend and evening hours. We have a private and population controlled waiting area; Full medical and mental health visits with extended times per visit – minimum is 1.5 h; On site vaccination and lab testing is available; 2 week maximum wait time for appointment and appointments are triaged to ensure wait time meets need. As urgent needs develop we have built in weekly appointments available; There is no termination from practice for no shows or last minute cancellations; Survivor driven input is within program development and evaluation activities; There are regular staff training on topics related to primary health care, human trafficking and trauma informed care;

#### References

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