



Health Education, Advocacy, Linkage
Because Human Trafficking is a Health Issue
HEALTrafficking.org

**Statement to the Committee on Energy and Commerce, Subcommittee on Health
In support of H.R. 7224, to reauthorize the Stop, Observe, Ask, and Respond (SOAR) to Health
and Wellness Training Program**

Reps. Cohen, Wagner, Cárdenas, and Carter

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The following testimony comes from a combination of my experiences on the frontlines of health care, the emergency department, as well as my national vantage point as Chief Medical Officer and co-founder of HEAL Trafficking.

Juan, a laborer worked 19 hours a day to repay an insurmountable debt to his employer. When he fell off a 10-foot platform on a construction job, he broke his back. Emergency physicians treated him with painkillers but overlooked the fact that he was chronically malnourished with signs and symptoms of tuberculosis.

Kia, a 17-year-old went to an emergency department with a gunshot wound to the leg. Her male companion told the provider it was the result of a drive-by shooting. No further questions were asked about the cause.

These are real-life stories of patients in the United States who were medically treated, but their human trafficking victimization was not “seen” by health professionals. (<https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/physicians-can-play-crucial-role-identifying-human-trafficking-victims>)

The majority of trafficked people in the United States access healthcare while being exploited.

What this means is that health care professionals must be equipped to respond when a victim comes through its doors. **The Stop, Observe, Ask, and Respond (SOAR) to Health and Wellness Training Program has been and continues to be vital in educating health professionals on how to respond to human trafficking.**

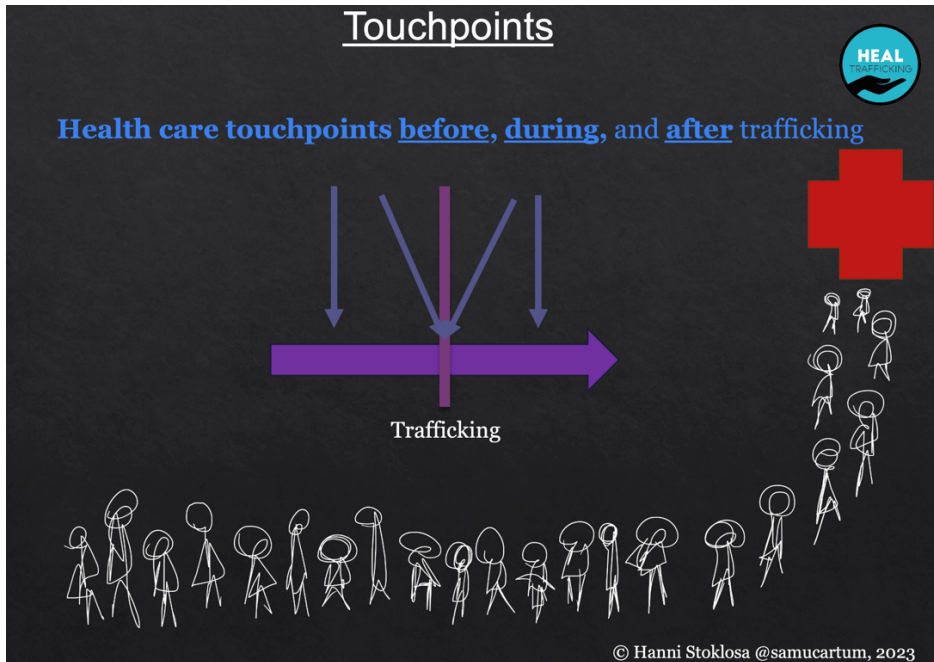
About HEAL Trafficking

For over a decade, HEAL Trafficking has led innovative health solutions to eradicate human trafficking in our communities worldwide. We do this through high level training and technical assistance and community building among practitioners. HEAL Trafficking's network encompasses over 4000 trafficking survivors and multi-disciplinary professionals in 50 countries. HEAL Trafficking brings together physicians, advanced practice clinicians, nurses, dentists, emergency medical services (EMS) personnel, psychologists, counselors, public health workers, health educators, researchers, clinical social workers, administrators, and other health professionals who work with and advocate for the health of survivors of human trafficking.

Why educate health professionals on human trafficking? Trust and Touchpoints

Trained health professionals are the most powerful force to end human trafficking. While trafficking survivors may have contact with other professions, such as law enforcement, they are unlikely to trust them. The majority of trafficked people in the United States access healthcare while being exploited. In fact, based on 2020-2023 data, National Human Trafficking Hotline data hears from more from Mental Health and Medical

Professionals than any other professional industry other than NGO representatives.



Why SOAR?

Clinical responses to human trafficking are complex and nuanced. Real harm can occur to trafficking victims if health professionals are not properly trained. ([https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(17\)32453-4/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(17)32453-4/fulltext)) Therefore, it is not enough for all health professionals to be simply aware of trafficking, but rather they must be empowered with skills to provide education to patients, assess for trafficking, and to care for trafficked persons. Educating clinicians about trafficking is about training them to translate knowledge into practice with the ultimate goal of improving the health and well-being of trafficked persons.

The Stop, Observe, Ask, and Respond (SOAR) to Health and Wellness Training Program which is administered under the Administration for Children & Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, helps accomplish just that. HEAL Trafficking, an initial advisor on SOAR curriculum content and design can attest to the essential resource it provides. SOAR serves as a high quality, free, continuing education resource for health professionals on trafficking that helps to bridge the gap between the millions of practicing clinician who have and have not been trained on trafficking. Moreover, it is easy to access by health professionals everywhere, whether they are practicing in a large urban hospital in Tennessee, a rural community health center in California, or a critical access emergency department in Missouri. Every health professional in the country can access the SOAR curriculum.

Why SOAR reauthorization?

Every day, trafficking victims are coming through the doors of clinics and hospitals. Opportunities to intervene are being missed because not all health professionals have yet been trained on trafficking. The SOAR to Health and Wellness Training Program helps empower millions of health professionals across the United States with high quality training that can **literally save lives**.

The opinions and conclusions expressed in this testimony are the author's alone and should not be interpreted as representing those of Mass General Brigham, Brigham and Women's Hospital or Harvard Medical School.