

Dental Exam Identifiers of Suspected Victims of Human Trafficking

The dental provider may not have complete access to every skin area that would be accessible to a nurse or physician, but those items listed below may be some indicators that your patient may be a victim of human trafficking and that further investigation is needed.

- Dental decay due to illegal drug use: methamphetamine-METH Mouth, dental infections, caries or periodontal disease.
- Oral lesions/infections indicating poor oral health and neglect.
- Poor Oral Hygiene-possibly due to the lack of toothbrush, toothpaste, or dental cleanings available to the victim.
- Forced pulling of teeth due to pain. A lost day of work due to pain is money lost for the trafficker.
- Forced removal of crowns, & appliances (possibly obtaining gold crowns for selling purposes.)
- Removal of braces (braces are sometimes removed from individuals to conceal the age of the victim and to improve appearance, especially in sex trafficking.)
- Implication of forced oral sex: ecchymosis, petechia, purpura (may include neck trauma due to force). TMJ issues could be noted as well.
- Condyloma acuminatum indicating sexual abuse in children.
- Head and neck injuries-possible bruising on exposed areas of skin due to blunt force trauma. Hearing may be lost or diminished due to trauma.
- Tattoos on neck region including the occipital region at hairline-This may be visible during a soft tissue exam. Usually indicates property of trafficker.
- Branding on any surface-This may also be visible on arms, at the hairline in neck region. Indicates a property to the trafficker.
- Nails may be injured due to torture (pulling out nails), physical labor or even poor nutrition.
- Bite marks-Those over 3.5 cm from incisor to incisor are made by an adult.
- Cigarette burns used as a torture or threat mechanism.
- Temporal Mandibular Joint Problems usually due to forced blunt trauma.
- Eye damage (Trafficker may rub burning compounds into the eyes as punishment). May also indicate person had no eye protection in a factory or while doing mine work.
- Hearing damage, headaches, may be the result of beatings, loud noises in work facilities without the proper equipment for ear protection.
- Bruising on the extremities, face, neck, ears, or head region may indicate trauma to the victim. When there is color variation, the wounds may be in a healing mode or possibly in various stages of healing indicating recurrent injury.
- Petechial eye hemorrhaging due to strangulation. This is sometimes used to threaten the victim. A victim can die from a stroke 3-4 days after this occurs.
They should be sent to an emergency clinic/physician right away.
- Damage/bruising of the Pinna of the ear. A child will not usually fall and cause this type of injury. It is usually due to blunt force trauma-attack on victim.

- Ligature marks on the wrists or the feet that may indicate a bondage situation.
- Evidence of gagging the individuals/placement of items in mouth to quiet the victim. Commissure irritation or lip sores may indicate bondage markers.
- The hands of an individual may indicate hard labor, and this is often found with the workers who have been captive on fishing boats, factories or in the fields.
- Respiratory indicators such as a cough, difficulty breathing or severe nasal congestion. Labor in confined spaces, chemical exposure or dark, warm/cold environments may cause any of these factors/or in combination.
- Generally, evidence on face, skin and hair indicating a poor nutritional state and lack of care. This may be especially noticeable in children. An unkept or worn appearance should be noted.
- Bald spots in hair may indicate that hair has been pulled out by perpetrator.
- Evidence of cutting on body or possible suicide attempts. Suicide attempts are reported to occur with those in captivity.

Dr. Nancy W. Burkhart is part of the Tri-County Human Trafficking Task Force-Dental Outreach for the Tri-County's Healthcare Subcommittee, Charleston, South Carolina.

Trafficking is a global issue but will be solved on a local level!!

Biography Dr. Nancy W. Burkhart, Ed.D., M.Ed., BSDH, AFAAOM

I am currently an Adjunct Professor at Texas A&M College of Dentistry, Dallas Texas and have been a faculty member since 1997.

My degrees: Doctor of Education Degree in Adult Education/Interdisciplinary, M.Ed. in Occupational Health Education from North Carolina State University, Raleigh, North Carolina, and a BSDH from Fairleigh Dickinson University School of Dentistry. I conducted a one-year postdoctoral fellowship in the section of Oral Pathology at the University of North Carolina School of Dentistry. My dissertation topic was “Oral Lichen Planus Commonalities: Educational and Psychological Implications.” I am the Co-Founder and faculty Co-Host of the International Oral Lichen Planus Support Group established in 1997 through Texas A&M College of Dentistry.

Our textbook, “General and Oral Pathology for the Dental Hygienist” DeLong L. & Burkhart NW, is published through Lippincott, Williams & Wilkins and now in its 3rd edition 2019, with a total of 30 Chapters that I have written for the three editions.

My awards include:

- 2006 recipient of the ADHA Crest Award through Proctor and Gamble
- 2012 The Philips Consumer Lifestyle and PennWell Corporation “Mentor of Distinction Award”.
- 2016 Awarded Affiliate Fellowship in The American Academy of the Oral Medicine. AFAAOM
- 2017 recipient of the “Award of Distinction” through SUNSTAR and PennWell, Corporation
- 2017 “Dental Professional of the Year” recipient through The International Pemphigus and Pemphigoid Foundation.

As a columnist for RDH since 2007, I write a monthly column titled, “Oral Medicine” for the former PennWell publication-now ENDEAVOR, that appear in both dental and dental hygiene literature. To date, I have written more than 150 columns for the publication on oral pathology/oral medicine topics. I have been a reviewer for several national dental journals, Dimensions of Dental Hygiene, and a past representative on the Joint Commission on National Dental Examinations-Dental Hygiene 2014-2018.

Presently, Dr. Nancy W. Burkhart is part of both the South Carolina State Human Trafficking Task Force Healthcare Subcommittee and the Tri-County Human Trafficking Task Force-Dental Outreach for the Tri-County's Healthcare Subcommittee, Charleston, South Carolina.