



Time Is of the Essence

Rikki Klieman reports on how fast-track initiatives and groundbreaking technology are helping to solve crimes and prevent rape.

DNA TESTING—A RELATIVELY NEW science at the time of the infamous O.J. Simpson trial—is now the most established forensic tool used by police and prosecutors to convict the guilty and exonerate the innocent. Yet neither of these goals can be met in a timely fashion if the DNA is not tested promptly. When it comes to the crime of sexual assault, DNA may be gathered from the crime scene and the victim's body, but if the offender is unknown, the DNA needs to be run through a database to search for a match. Two questions emerge as the clock starts to run: 1) Are the samples from known felons tested regularly and entered into the data base? 2) Is the suspect's DNA collected and tested quickly in order to obtain a match?

Cast members of *Grey's Anatomy*, including **Ellen Pompeo, Patrick Dempsey, James Pickens Jr., T.R. Knight, Sandra Oh, Chandra Wilson, Justin Chambers,** and **Eric Dane**, were the hosts for the Rape Treatment Center of Santa Monica-UCLA Medical Center's annual benefit brunch, where California Attorney General **Bill Lockyer** joined the center's director, **Gail Abarbanel**, in announcing a \$1.1 million pilot program known as the Fast Track Forensic Program for DNA processing. In the world of sexual assault cases, being able to process DNA evidence within five days instead of six months can work wonders in solving rape cases more quickly and preventing repeat offenders from committing more crimes.

This announcement was heard by more than 800 celebrities, community leaders, and Rape Treatment Center supporters who gathered at Green Acres, the exquisite estate of **Ron Burkle**, in Beverly Hills. They included brunch emcee **Sean Hayes**, actors **Diahann Carroll, Brooke Shields,** and **Angie Harmon**, Senator **Barbara Boxer**, Representatives **Jane Harmon** and **Henry Waxman** of California, Congressman **Bud Cramer** of Alabama, District Attorney **Steve Cooley**, Los Angeles Police Chief **William Bratton**, and first lady of the city of Los Angeles **Corina Villaraigosa**.

All of us cheered and then listened with rapt attention as various cast members of *Grey's*

Anatomy shared their thoughts about the work of the Rape Treatment Center. Knight got it right: "They've changed discriminatory laws to give victims more rights and protections in the legal system. They've changed the way hospitals and police officers treat victims. They educated the public when offenders started using rape drugs as a weapon. And now they're advancing the use of DNA to help solve rape cases."

Pompeo noted that the center "is recognized as the nation's model program for the treatment of rape victims—and for its leadership in changing the way victims are treated across the country." She quoted a victim treated at the center, who described her experience as follows: "When I was raped, I experienced death without dying.... There was no innocence, no joy, no trust, and no belief in the possibility of tomorrow."

The Rape Treatment Center gave me the key to regaining my life. They helped me find courage and strength within myself that I did not know I possessed. Their work is the work of angels."

Oh addressed the misconceptions about rape, saying, "Until we understand the reality of rape, we can't prevent it." The reality is that "one in six women in the United States is a victim of rape or attempted rape. It happens in every neighborhood. These victims are numbered among our friends, our families, and our working colleagues. And in 80 percent of the cases, the rapist is someone the victim knows."

There was barely a dry eye under the tent as victims of rape told their stories with bravery and dignity. There could not have been a listener who did not identify with the fear of one young woman in the television industry who was brutally attacked by an unknown intruder in her home. "I never thought this could happen to me," she said. "I lived in a nice house.... I worked hard.... I was a good person. In an instant, my life was changed forever."

Putting DNA testing on the fast track may help dedicated investigators solve similar cases quickly, and for that I say, "Bravo!" ★

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FROM LEFT: Justin Chambers, James Patrick Jr., Eric Dane, T.R. Knight, Sandra Oh, Chandra Wilson, Ellen Pompeo, and Patrick Dempsey.