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.

A 17-year-old went to an emergency department (ED) 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 this country who were treated but not identified by physicians as victims of human trafficking.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security describes human trafficking as “modern-day slavery (that) involves the use of force, fraud, or coercion.” The forced acts may be of a sexual nature or related to labor. Many Americans assume that trafficking is a problem only on foreign soil, but this is not so.

Human trafficking affects individuals across the world, and right here in Michigan. It is commonly regarded as the second largest criminal enterprise after drugs. Human trafficking affects every community in Michigan across age, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic backgrounds.

Physicians are uniquely positioned to recognize and help patients who may be victims of human trafficking.

“We can use our diagnostic skills from other forms of interpersonal violence to help us identify trafficking survivors…. Physicians should look for other ‘pattern recognition pieces’ beyond patients’ presenting signs or symptoms.”

Havi Shkolnisky, MD, MPH
Regents and Wayneuse Hospital

Join experts in the field to discuss the unique challenges physicians face in identifying and treating people at risk for human trafficking. Learn to recognize signs and symptoms of victims seeking care that are likely involved in trafficking, and what a physician’s reporting responsibilities and legal obligations are in suspected cases of sex trafficking. To register for this critical training and meet Michigan licensure requirements, visit:

https://scs.msu.edu/events/ALL_F/15271/