MEDIA RELEASE

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October shines spotlight on 24/7 service to support people who have experienced sexual assault

October brings the opportunity to shine the spotlight on a local 24/7 service which supports people who have experienced sexual assault.

Coordinator of Toowoomba Hospital’s Sexual Assault Support Service and psychologist Ms Karen Fernie said October was Sexual Violence Awareness Month.

“People may not know Toowoomba has a supportive crisis response service which is available 24 hours a day for women and men 14 years and over who have recently experienced sexual assault,” Ms Fernie said.

“Trained staff will provide information about medical and reporting options and enable people to make their own choices in a respectful and non-judgmental way.”

She said it was difficult to know exactly how many local people had been sexually assaulted as research estimated between 85 and 90 per cent of cases were not reported to police.

“Even at our 24/7 service at Toowoomba Hospital’s Kobi House our presentations this year have been nearly 20 per cent lower than previous years,” Ms Fernie said.

“This certainly doesn’t mean sexual assaults are not happening, but for some reason people are not coming forward at the time it happens.

“We find they usually access our counselling service a few weeks or months after the event when it starts to affect their daily functioning and they haven’t been able to forget it and move on as they had hoped.

“If they come in at the time it happens, they have better access to a wider range of medical and reporting options, as well as it’s our chance to help manage some of the impacts of the trauma for them so they hopefully don’t go onto develop Acute Stress Disorder or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.”

The service offers free and confidential consultations in a safe environment, with access to medical help and ongoing counselling if needed.

Ms Fernie said she was conducting specialised professional development sessions during October. These sessions are for potential new support staff for the 24-hour crisis response service.

“Sexual violence is a crime, and it is not acceptable in our community – no matter who it happens to,” she said.
“It does happen in our community - just because you may have been fortunate not to experience it, please don’t be complacent and think it doesn’t happen.”

The Toowoomba Sexual Assault Support Service can be contacted during business hours on (07) 4616 6950 or after hours through Toowoomba Hospital switch on (07) 4616 6000. Alternatively, victims of sexual assault can attend a hospital emergency department or local police station.

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