

**Hair Cutting or Pulling**  
**SART Listserv**  
**October 2006**

**States are listed as a point of reference and do not necessarily represent a statewide perspective**

*Issue: Are SARTs cutting /pulling hair during medical forensic exams?*

**Georgia**

- Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) recommends pulling known hair;
- Reference samples with the hair root are deemed best reference;
- GBI specifies that hemostats or other such devices not be used in the process;
- GBI protocol references the use of a small nit-type combs. The process takes a long time of aggressive combing to get a fraction of the minimum 25-hair strand known reference sample. The comb is more appropriate for capturing possible transfer hair evidence and that is how we use it;
- By far, the majority practice in GA is NOT to collect known hair samples from a victims. It doesn't get analyzed and it has NEVER made a case at trial.

**Oklahoma (Oklahoma City)**

- We do not pluck head/pubic hair. Our crime lab no longer processes it;
- The step is still in our kits, but we skip it;
- Because we provide victim-centered care, we find that plucking hair is painful and mainly unnecessary;
- If the lab needs hair from the victim, for whatever reason, they request it at a later date. It should be done for perpetrators, however.

**National Perspective**

- There is no reason to keep collecting victims' hairs, but it makes sense to do it for perpetrators since it might take a court order if the assailant's hair was needed later;
- The reality is that virtually nobody needs hair anymore to solve cases;

Joanne Archambault wrote an excellent article on this in Sexual Assault Report a few years ago. The information is available online at <http://www.mysati.com/joannepubs.htm>

*Previous Listserv discussion:*

**SART Listserv**  
**November 2005**

**What alternatives are used for DNA collection other than hair plucking?**

**Background Information:**

- My understanding is that crime labs require at least twenty five of the victims' hairs to compare with the one or two found in evidence;
- Reference hairs collected from the patient are not for DNA analysis (typically in the living SA patient);
- Victims' hairs can be collected at a later date - if needed for comparison to suspects' hairs;

- Victims' hair samples can be affected by dying and drug use;
- Victims' hair samples are compared against unknown hairs recovered at crime scene or on suspect's body/ clothing, etc.

### **Disadvantages of Hair Plucking**

- The system should be victim centered- not crime lab centered. The process should not re-traumatize victims;
- Victims' hairs used to identify unknown suspects- but most victims know suspects- and can even give their addresses and phone numbers;
- Most cases deal with proving use of force and/or lack of consent - DNA doesn't prove force was used;
- Hair transfers found during kit completion and/or at the scene really only can be used to prove victim and suspect had some sort of contact - it doesn't prove sexual contact and/or nonconsensual contact;
- Collection of victims' hairs is useless if the rest of the investigation already proves contact;
- Even in cases where a victim has had her head hair pulled out during the sexual assault- there are ways to document the trauma and later collect hair samples if the pulled out hair is found with the suspect and/or at the scene;
- The SANE is not to be seen as gearing her collection to what best suits prosecution - but SANEs can critically think about evidence applicable to each victim's specific experience;
- Evidence collection should not be based upon a "list" but on relevancy.