

Sangvi

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Photo by Seema Marwaha

A duffel bag with basic supplies similar to the one Sangvi was given by an emergency department nurse.

My senior year of high school was very difficult. My mother became severely depressed, my father worked 2 jobs to make ends meet, and my grandmother had a debilitating stroke. I was also raped. I ended up becoming a working girl after a male friend convinced me it would lead to a better life. This isn't an excuse for why I got into sex work, but I want people to understand how I got there.

After several months, I knew I wanted out. I was worried about getting a sexually transmitted disease or getting pregnant. The only person I could think of to go to was my family doctor. I am Canadian born, but my parents are immigrants from South Asia and my doctor was part of our community. I grew up going to her. When I disclosed to her what I was doing, she reacted more like a relative than a doctor. She told me I was stupid. She gasped when I told her how many men I had serviced. Worst of all, she threatened to tell my parents. I regretted trusting her and never went back to her. My parents eventually found out what I was doing, but I don't think she was the one who told them.

Instead, I started going to emergency departments any time I needed medical care. I always said little about my situation. Sometimes they would give me antibiotics for urinary tract infections, other times I would get an HIV test. I think I

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went 7 or 8 times. On one of my last visits, my nurse gave me a duffel bag full of clothes and supplies as I was leaving. She also gave me a pamphlet for a free clinic for sex workers. At first, I was offended. Yes, I was a working girl, but I didn't think I acted or looked like one. She just figured it out.

I did end up going to the free clinic, which I credit for saving my life. They treated me without judgment. They prescribed birth control and gave me doses of Plan B. They kept everything anonymous. At the clinic, I met a community worker who became a lifeline for me and helped me, over several months, to get out of sex work. I'm so grateful for the empathy and kindness this clinic showed me. I am 23 years old, and it's been 4 years since I've done any sex work.

The patient's name has been changed to protect her privacy.

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