



UM Medical Students Debut Broken Barcode Tattoo to Combat Human Trafficking During Super Bowl Weekend

Medical students with the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine took a leading role in working to combat human trafficking before and during Super Bowl weekend in Miami-Dade County. Among their activities, from educating health care providers to securing public service announcements, the students debuted a temporary tattoo of a broken barcode.

“Historically, many traffickers will brand their victims with a tattooed barcode as a sign of property,” said second-year UM medical student Isabella M. Ferré, M.P.H., who led the effort alongside fellow area student activists, University of Miami Health System providers, law enforcement, and community partners to spread awareness of the plight of victims and increased activities associated with high-profile tourism events such as the Super Bowl.





UM medical students designed the Freedom Movement tattoo.

The students designed the tattoo to symbolize that no child or person is for sale. The tattoo also contains the national trafficking hotline number, making this campaign not only about spreading awareness but providing a lifeline for those who might need the number, said Ferré. UM medical students and a local documentary producer, who formed the Freedom Movement anti-human trafficking initiative, also promoted the broken barcode emblem at Super Bowl related events and high tourism areas. The group assembled at Bayfront Park on Saturday carrying red umbrellas with the barcode.

“Barcodes are one of the major types of branding marks by traffickers,” said Jazlyn Merida, M.P.H., second-year UM medical student. “Many of these barcode tattoos will scan with a smartphone, placing a monetary value to that individual. This is only one type of branding variation and it is a psychological methodology to force an individual to relinquish his or her free will.”

In the weeks leading up to Super Bowl weekend, Ferré, fellow UM students and activists with the Freedom Movement partnered with influencers to wear the tattoo. “Our emblem isn’t a barcode. It’s a shattered barcode,” said Ferré. “This is a symbolically rich statement against all forms of trafficking - such as sexual exploitation, labor, and organ harvesting.

“The emblem also hopes to evoke empowerment, as it shatters every negative and unhealthy emotion associated with a branding,” said Ferré. Furthermore, the emblem contains a national trafficking hotline number, which provides the



community with a resource for help, she said.



Student Brett Colbert, left, Adriana Maribona, and others raised awareness in Bayfront Park.

As part of a larger anti-human trafficking effort with University of Miami Health System providers, Miller School public health experts and UM/Jackson Memorial Hospital, the medical students (formerly named Code Rise) recognized trafficking as a problem in their community and further mobilized efforts to bring about social change. Student organizers realized that human trafficking transcended all sectors of society and the public needed to be made aware of this pervasive social issue. Infiltrating Super Bowl weekend with the tattoo and other protests, the group further elevated awareness of human trafficking.



“The medical community plays an integral role in stemming human trafficking,” said JoNell Potter, Ph.D., professor of clinical obstetrics, gynecology and reproductive sciences at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine. With guidance from Miller School faculty who have launched efforts to provide health care resources and educate the medical community on recognizing trafficked victims seeking medical help, students have been working tirelessly to bring awareness to heightened trafficking activity during the Super Bowl and other events that draw tourists to South Florida.

“The students are part of a growing community of advocates who saw this as an urgent need and have continuously devised new creative tools and platforms to build awareness and help victims,” Dr. Potter said.

With support from faculty at the Miller School of Medicine, State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle and City of Miami Mayor Francis X. Suarez, the group worked to reach unprecedented heights in the fight against trafficking of all forms.