



Domestic Violence Reports



By Glennah Trochet, MD

Law enforcement has long complained that forms for reporting domestic abuse are too illegible, complex or incomplete. Sacramento County is now asking providers to adopt a new, simple form.

The State requires all healthcare providers to screen their patients for domestic violence. Healthcare providers must report to law enforcement any injuries suspected to be caused by domestic violence.

Over the years, the Healthcare Provider Domestic Violence Network* has been working to educate physicians, dentists, emergency responders, and others about their responsibilities. In addition, the network has worked very hard to make the process of reporting effective for healthcare providers, law enforcement and victims.

In 1994, the first Sacramento County Domestic Violence Protocol for Healthcare Providers was created and distributed. It included a suggested reporting form ~ but physicians, hospitals, or dentists who chose to report adapted the form for their own use.

What we heard over the years from law enforcement was that the forms were sometimes too complex or illegible, and did not always contain the information needed to apprehend a perpetrator or protect a victim.

Over the past two years the network has worked with representatives from law enforcement and the district attorney to modify and revise the form. We now have a finished version of the form, and an updated Sacramento County Domestic Violence Protocol for Healthcare Providers. The single-page form is simple, uses check offs as much as possible, and provides information that law enforcement needs, but physicians don't always think about.

District Attorney Jan Scully and I are sending the form and the protocol out to our medical and dental community with a cover letter asking them to use the form for reporting purposes.

Key roles in this effort were undertaken by Mary Campbell Bliss of Sutter Health and Jayne Cohill from Mercy Healthcare Sacramento, co-chairs of the HPDVN, and Dr. Connie Mitchell Educational Director of Domestic Violence of the California Medical Training center at UCD. We thank them for their work.

Reporting domestic violence is important for several reasons: it protects victims and helps prevent further harm; it allows for surveillance, giving a better picture of the extent and incidence of domestic violence in our community; and it allows for further study of the problem to learn better ways of dealing with it.

Domestic violence affects all social economic levels, can put children in grave danger ~ even if they themselves are not directly abused ~ and can result in death.

Frequently, cultural norms must be changed.

In the course of their work, physicians come across this condition often, particularly if they screen for it, and can use the opportunity to intervene.

In 1999 the District attorney counted 1198 reports of domestic violence. Of the victims, 1026 were female, 153 were male, and 19 were not marked by gender. Only 381 suspects had previous domestic violence convictions. Clearly, law enforcement alone will not be able to solve the problem.

The devastating health consequences of domestic violence are frequently seen in all healthcare settings. No one agency or person can deal with this problem alone. However, by recognizing and reporting suspected domestic violence, we may be able to decrease the incidence of this unacceptable behavior in our community.

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Copies of the new form are being sent to providers in Sacramento County. Copies may also be obtained from the County Health Department, or downloaded from the Internet at www.scph.com.

* The Network was created by the Sacramento County Violent Injury Prevention Coalition, one of whose charter members was the Sacramento El-Dorado Medical Society.

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