

Abuse: ***Give only page 2 to patient*

Questions to use — Physicians should first introduce the subject of abuse in a general way. As an example, "Many patients I see are coping with an abusive relationship, so I've started asking about domestic violence routinely." This kind of introduction can prevent the patient from feeling that she has been singled out for questioning.

There are many ways to then specifically ask about abuse. The **SAFE** questions have been proposed as a useful screen for domestic violence:

- **Stress/Safety** — "Do you feel safe in your relationship?"
- **Afraid/Abused** — "Have you ever been in a relationship where you were threatened, hurt or afraid?"
- **Friends/Family** — "Are your friends or family aware that you have been hurt? Could you tell them, and would they be able to give you support?"
- **Emergency Plan** — "Do you have a safe place to go and the resources you need in an emergency?"

The Massachusetts Medical Society Committee on Violence recommends asking *one question* that can be adapted as needed: "**At any time, has a partner (or someone) hit, kicked, or otherwise hurt or threatened you?**" This one question has been found to significantly increase the detection rate of partner violence [44].

A *three question* Abuse Assessment Screen has been shown to be as sensitive as more extensive research questionnaires in identifying physical or sexual abuse in pregnancy [45]. The questions asked are:

- "Within the last year, have you been hit, slapped, kicked or otherwise physically hurt by someone?"
- "Since you've been pregnant, have you been hit, slapped, kicked, or otherwise physically hurt by someone?"
- "Within the last year, has anyone forced you to have sexual activities?"

An abused patient may deny the abuse for several reasons [46]. She may not be emotionally ready to admit the reality of her situation, she may blame herself, or feel like a failure if she admits to being abused. She may fear rejection by the physician, be ashamed, believe that the abuse will not happen again, fear reprisal by her abuser, believe that she has no alternatives, and she may lack knowledge of resources that could help her. If the physician suspects abuse and the patient denies it, the physician should ask about domestic violence again on a subsequent visit.

These approaches increase the detection rate of domestic violence, but their true sensitivity and specificity are not known. There are no studies available that address the issue of false positive results, that is, women reporting abuse that has not occurred.

LEGAL ISSUES — Healthcare providers who identify victims of violence may be required to report to criminal justice authorities. Injuries that are caused by lethal weapons or have been inflicted as part of a criminal act are required to be reported in most states. The medical community has expressed concern that the protective benefits of this practice have not been demonstrated and patients may avoid revealing victimization if it will be reported. It seems prudent and is ethical to inform patients of reports that are to be submitted. The provider should inquire if the patient feels that a report may put them at any risk and be prepared to help lessen potential harm.

RESOURCES for Victims of Domestic Violence:

704-872-3403 Crisis/Help Line for Abuse & Sexual Assault
800-799-SAFE Hotline for Local Services
Crossroads Behavioral Healthcare **888-235-HOPE** or 704-872-2544 or 336-835-1001
800-4-A-CHILD HelpU 800-422-4453
800-662-7030 Careline
888-232-9124 NC Coalition Against Domestic Violence
919-676-7611 NC Coalition Against Sexual Assault
800-222-2000 National Council
800-TRY-NOVA National Assoc Victim Assistance
800-422-4453 National Survivors of Childhood Abuse
303-839-1852 Ncoalition
415-252-8900 Family Violence
Family Violence Prevention Service 632-7964
Davie Domestic Violence Svc 336-751-4357
Safe Horizon offers victim assistance & advocacy for crime victims: www.Safehorizon.org,
212-577-7777
Victim's Assistance online www.vaonline.org
US Dept of Justice operates Office of Victims of Crime Resource Center 800/627-6872 or
www.ojp.usdoj.gov./ovc/
www.nolo.com = Legal Self-help
www.PTSDalliance.org 877-507-7873 www.ocfoundation.org www.mentalhealth.com or .org
Sexual Function Health Council of Am Fndtn for U 800-242-2383

Provided for your health education by: **Neil Matthew Kassman, M.D.**

Carl A. Foulks, Jr., M.D.

Cathy Wayand, ANP-C

Gastroenterology / Digestive Diseases
Piedmont HealthCare, P.A.

704-838-8215