



Gender-based domestic violence: How can I help my patients?

Hints and tips brought together from the RCOG IWD 2015 Workshop session

1. Get knowledgeable.

Find out how domestic and sexual violence affects women and girls

Broaden your understanding of domestic and sexual violence.
Find your local domestic abuse professional support services and ask their advice.

Encourage colleagues and reception staff to do the same.
What is the situation in your local community?

2. Be open-minded and ready for the unknown

Think about missed opportunities.

Learn to recognise behaviours.

Make sure you're not stereotyping - you can't tell by looking at people.

Be prepared for hidden stories - don't make assumptions.

3. Create a safe and welcoming environment

Display information and helplines for patients in waiting rooms.

Remember what your options are - e.g. chaperone, translator, panic button, inviting a female colleague.

Avoid escalating the situation.

4. Build rapport and trust

Think about your body language - is it encouraging your patient to trust you?

Show you care, understand and believe your patient.

Give your patient your full attention and explain you can and *will* help.

Recognise that your patient has strength and courage.

5. Keep an eye out for red flags

Multiple attendances for different problems (or non-attendance).
'Inexplicable' or 'vague' symptoms invite deeper enquiry - other vulnerabilities, repeat terminations or losses, no contraception, a 'controlling' partner.

Review a patient's notes - the red flags may appear.

Think about the danger your patient might be in.

Use the word 'harm' rather than 'violence'.

Note down potential patterns of abuse.

6. Trust your instincts

Listen to your gut feelings or hunches about a situation.

Pay attention to that 'uneasy feeling' when you think something is wrong.

BUT don't leap to a diagnosis - it's better to say 'I don't know' than get it wrong.

Alert the next person about your concerns or feelings.

7. Your responses - what do you do when a patient discloses?

Listen, validate and don't judge.

Avoid clumsy responses, e.g. looking shocked.

Protect confidentiality but check with your patients what they consent to be disclosed to other agencies e.g. police, social services.

Have telephone numbers to hand for help, especially if the patient is in immediate danger and needs a refuge.

Tell the patient what you are going to do next.

Remember - doing a little is better than nothing but doing nothing is better than harm.

Is this an emergency? Is there immediate danger?

Think about referrals and ongoing care.

Are there any children involved?

Document everything and share with colleagues if given consent to do so.

Document potential patterns to avoid missed opportunities in future.

Look to involve a wider sphere of professionals including domestic violence experts.

Try to arrange another appointment with the patient at a suitable time and follow up.

Don't act alone, discuss cases in confidence with supervisors/trusted experts.

Remember - social service referral is available at any stage.

Seek training for you and your team from experts in domestic violence.

Be especially aware and informed of vulnerability of younger girls. Work together as a team with colleagues (medical and admin) to provide a safe, informative environment.

Demonstrate and encourage professional curiosity among your colleagues.

Look to institutionalise the practice of reflective learning.

8. Safe reporting and safe referral

9. Follow-up

10. Strengthening systems

Useful information

For professionals

- Department of Health domestic violence and abuse – advice for professionals: www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-health-professionals-on-domestic-violence
- NICE public health guidance: Domestic violence and abuse: how health services, social care and the organisations they work with can respond effectively: www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ph50
- Refuge www.refuge.org.uk/

For patients (in the UK)

- In an emergency in the UK, call 999.
- 24-hour National Domestic Violence Helpline, 0808 2000 247 run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge (calls from a landline are free).
- Shelter - 0808 800 4444 for support with finding accommodation.
- Rights of Women 020 72516577. www.rightsofwomen.org.uk – offering legal support.
- NSPCC Helpline 0808 800 5000 <http://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse> for

advice and support for young people and children to talk to professional councillors 24/7.

- Voices of Experience – support & friendship <http://www.voe.org.uk/>

Useful websites:

- EDV Global Foundation www.gfedv.org/
- National Centre for Domestic Violence: www.ncdv.org.uk
- NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/livewell/abuse/pages/domestic-violence-help.aspx
- RCN information on guidance for nurses: www.rcn.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/7849/7/001207.pdf
- Men's Advice Line (for men experiencing domestic violence): www.mensadvice.org.uk
- Women's Aid - The Survivor's Handbook - clear guidance on every aspect of seeking support (available to download in multiple languages): www.womensaid.org.uk/domestic-violence-survivors-handbook.asp?section=0001000100080001