



News Release

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Emergency Room Staff Can Help Detect, Prevent Domestic Violence

(Salt Lake City, UT) – New data released today by the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) show that emergency department staff are in an important position to uncover and ultimately stop the cycle of domestic abuse.

A survey conducted in Utah EDs found 58% of staff in urban areas (Davis, Salt Lake, Utah, and Weber counties) report they routinely ask patients about domestic/intimate partner abuse. However, the opposite was seen in rural EDs, where just 43% report bringing up the subject of domestic abuse with patients.

“Emergency doctors and nurses have a unique opportunity to broach the subject of abuse when a patient comes in for treatment of an injury,” said UDOH Violence Prevention Specialist Katie McMinn. “While it’s terribly sad when a patient admits to being hurt by a partner, it’s a chance for specialists to intervene and get the victim help.”

And, says McMinn, it’s critical that ED staff receive the proper training to recognize domestic and intimate partner violence. The survey found that more than half (55%) of ED staff members feel they’re inadequately trained to screen, assess, and make referrals for victims of abuse. At the same time, 84% say they want to receive such training.

“Emergency department staff can be important allies for battered women,” said Barbara Ferrara, Emergency Room Care Manager at Intermountain Medical Center.

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The UDOH and the Utah Domestic Violence Council Health Care Committee provide training to health care providers on how to screen and assess patients suspected of being victims of domestic and intimate partner violence. A training manual is available free of charge to providers at <http://health.utah.gov/vipp>.

“The manual gives doctors and nurses the skills they need to properly treat families of domestic violence,” said University of Utah pediatrician Kathy Franchek, M.D. “When health care providers know what to look for, we’re able to ask the right questions to identify victims of abuse, and then give these individuals and families the care and support they need to get out of abusive situations.”

The survey also showed:

- 81% of EDs in urban areas had printed information about local domestic violence resources available for patients. This was an increase of 20% from 2003.
- Despite the increase in available resources for patients, EDs in urban areas reported a 25% decrease in the amount of materials actually given to patients since 2003.
- In rural area EDs, an increase of 53% was seen in printed resources available and the amount of materials given to patients increased 37%.
- Overall, the top five obstacles for identifying abuse were:
 - Patient didn’t want to talk about the abuse (96%);
 - Patient was under the influence of drugs or alcohol (92%);
 - Patient feared repercussions (88%);
 - ED staff were not trained to interview victims of abuse (82%); and
 - ED staff felt it was frustrating to screen for abuse because they could do little to help (76%) and there were language barriers (76%).

To download a report of the survey results or the updated training manual, visit <http://health.utah.gov/vipp>.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.