



Screening for Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is the use of physical abuse, verbal or emotional abuse, sexual abuse, or economic abuse (eg, withholding money, lying about assets) to exert power or control over someone or to prevent someone from making a free choice. Domestic violence is a crime in all fifty states. Three-fourths of domestic violence victims are women. Domestic violence is a major public health problem in the United States and around the world.

Accurate, thorough documentation of the patient's injuries is essential in cases of suspected abuse because it can serve as objective, third-party evidence useful in legal proceedings. For example, medical records can help victims to obtain a restraining order, or to qualify for public housing, welfare, health and life insurance, and immigration relief.

To be admissible in a court of law, medical documentation should include the following (Isaac & Enos, 2001):

1. Photographs of the injuries, taken during the initial examination.
2. Body maps, which document the extent and location of the injuries.
3. Description of the patient's demeanor (crying, angry, agitated, upset), including a record of the patient's comments about how the injuries occurred. The patient's own words should be set off in quotation marks or identified by such phrases as "the patient states" or "the patient reports." Health professionals should avoid any phrases—such as "patient claims" or "patient alleges"—that cast doubt on the patient's reliability.
4. Also avoid legal terms such as "alleged perpetrator" or "assailant." Do not use conclusive terms such as "assault and battery" or "domestic violence" in documenting a case; let the factual information in the record speak for itself.
5. Any description in which the patient identifies the abuser, such as "my boyfriend kicked me."
6. The time of day when the patient is examined and, if possible, how much elapsed time since the injuries occurred? For example, "patient says that last night her husband punched her."
7. **Legible handwriting.** Too often, doctors' or nurses' poor handwriting on medical records makes the documentation inadmissible as evidence.

Who should be screened for domestic violence?

1. Every healthcare facility serving women, children, and older adults needs to screen for potential domestic violence.

Who should screen for domestic violence?

PCPs shall screen Enrollees for signs of domestic violence and shall offer referral services to applicable domestic violence prevention community agencies.

1. Florida statute 790.24 requires healthcare providers to report gunshot or life-threatening wounds or injuries. Obviously, this does not cover the majority of injuries sustained in Intimate Partner abuse.
2. **However reporting suspected domestic violence without the informed consent of the woman is unethical and may cause the abuser to retaliate.**
3. Use professional interpreters when needed, rather than a patient's friend or family member.



Domestic Violence (DV) Screening Form

Name: _____

Date: _____

This information is part of your health care record. Your responses will not be released to anyone without your written consent, except as otherwise provided by law. If you do not feel comfortable talking today, you can call a hot line number anytime at:

- National Domestic Violence Hotline:**
1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or TTY 1-800-787-3224.
<http://www.ndvh.org/>
- Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence Hotline:**
(800) 500-1119, or TTY: (800) 621-4202
<http://www.fcadv.org/>
- Florida Department of Children and Families Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-500-1119**
<http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/domesticviolence/>
- Domestic Violence Intervention Program** – A program dedicated to teaching new skills that replace abusive, violent, conflict resolution
Safety Council Contact Information
<http://www.floridasafety.org/course/text.asp?class=33>
1-877-700-7066 - support@floridasafety.org (Email)

Please answer the following questions:

SCREENING TOOL FOR ABUSE OF WOMEN			
Question	Circle Best Answer		
Source: Centre for Studies in Family Medicine, n.d. Used with permission.			
1. In general, how would you describe your relationship?	a lot of tension	some tension	no tension
2. Do you and your partner work out arguments with ...	great difficulty	some difficulty	no difficulty
3. Do arguments ever result in you feeling put down or bad about yourself?	often	sometimes	never
4. Do arguments ever result in hitting, kicking, or pushing?	often	sometimes	never
5. Do you ever feel frightened by what your partner says or does?	often	sometimes	never
6. Has your partner ever abused you physically?	often	sometimes	never
7. Has your partner ever abused you emotionally?	often	sometimes	never

SCREENING TOOL FOR ABUSE OF WOMEN

Question	Circle Best Answer		
8. Has your partner ever abused you sexually?	often	sometimes	never