Identifying Victims of Domestic Violence

Although many women/men who are victims of abuse will not volunteer any information, they will discuss it if asked simple, direct, questions in a non-judgmental way and in a confidential setting. The patient should be interviewed alone without her partner present.

You may want to offer a statement such as:
“Because violence is so common in many women’s lives, I’ve begun to ask about it routinely.”

Then you can ask a direct question, such as:
“At any time, has your partner hit, kicked or otherwise hurt or frightened you?”

If Patient Answers Yes, The Following Steps Are Suggested:

1. Encourage them to talk about it:
   “How do you feel about it?”
   “What would you like to do about this?”

2. Listen non-judgmentally.
   This serves both to begin the healing process for the person and to give you an idea of what kind of referrals she needs.

3. Validate
   Victims of domestic violence are frequently not believed, and the fear they report is minimized.
   “You are not alone.”
   “You don’t deserve to be treated this way.”
   “Help is available to you.”

4. Document
   Complaints should be described in patients own words.
   Detailed descriptions of injuries.
   Duty to report child abuse and neglect.

5. Assess the danger to your patient.

6. Provide appropriate treatment referral and support.

   Give your patients verbal information about local and national resources. Have information posted in your offices and restrooms!

DON’T judge the success of the intervention by the patient’s immediate actions.