

# Annual "Health Cares About Domestic Violence Day"

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October 12 marks the annual Health Cares about Domestic Violence Day - a day that promotes routine screening of patients for domestic violence. Domestic violence is a health care problem of epidemic proportions in Arizona and throughout this country. Arizona ranks second nationally in the rate of females killed by males. Nationally, 31 percent of women report being physically or sexually abused by a husband or boyfriend at some point in their lives, according to a 1998 Commonwealth Fund survey. The United States Department of Justice has reported that a current or former partner injured 37 percent of all women who sought medical care in hospital emergency rooms for violence-related injuries. And approximately 1,320 women are murdered by their partners every year - more than three women a day.

"Many women who are murdered by their partner have seen their health care provider to treat previous injuries from abuse," said Lara Slifko, Grants Manager for Arizona Foundation for Legal Services and Education, "But too often, health care providers miss this golden opportunity to help a battered woman because they don't ask the right questions. Simply by routinely screening patients and by providing them with information and referrals, we can make an enormous difference for battered women and their children - and in some cases we can save lives."

Many experts say that properly trained doctors and other health care providers are uniquely qualified to intervene to help battered women. Yet, a study published in the August 4, 1999 issue of The Journal of the American Medical Association found that less than ten percent of primary care physicians routinely screen patients for partner abuse during regular office visits.

The effort is guided by screening materials from the Family Violence Prevention Fund, which provides specific guidelines to help providers in primary care, ob-gyn, family planning, emergency care, mental health and inpatient settings screen effectively for abuse. Family Violence Prevention Fund also leads a campaign through which women can encourage their health care providers to screen patients for domestic violence. Patients can order free postcards that urge their doctors to screen for abuse by calling, toll-free, 1-888-Rx-ABUSE, TTY: 1-800-595-4889 and requesting a patient card. "These postcards can be a powerful tool in urging health care providers to help patients who are battered," said Family Violence Prevention Fund Executive Director Esta Soler. "If doctors hear from their patients as well as from leaders in the domestic violence and medical communities, they will be more likely to learn about abuse and intervene to help battered patients. We expect this campaign to have significant impact."

NOTE: Media review copies of the Family Violence Prevention Fund's domestic violence screening guidelines and the patient postcards are available from Lisa Lederer at 202/371-1999.