



# Making a Difference

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**F**amily violence exists in every city, every neighborhood, and every community. It is often a silent cycle of physical, emotional, verbal, and financial abuse that leaves its victims feeling trapped and helpless. Because 65 percent of all physical child abuse and 75 percent of all physical domestic violence results in injuries to the head, neck, and/or mouth, the dental professional is often the first person to render treatment to abuse victims as well as being their first line of defense. Even when victims of violence avoid seeking medical attention, they will keep routine and emergency treatment dental appointments. Dentists, registered dental hygienists, and registered dental assistants are designated by law as mandated reporters in California to report suspicions of abuse and neglect in patients. Dental professionals and allied personnel must report domestic violence physical assault cases in addition to suspected child abuse/neglect and elder abuse/neglect cases.

The April and May issues of the *Journal of the California Dental Association* are dedicated to Family Violence Prevention. The April issue focused on child abuse/neglect, and elder and dependent adult abuse/neglect. The May

issue is focused on domestic and intimate partner violence, and violence against people with special needs. Articles address frequent questions the dental community has asked, such as:

“Why doesn’t the abused person in domestic violence just leave the relationship?”

“Why should dental professionals get involved? What are some dentists’ experiences?”

“What are the signs of attempted strangulation and why is that important for the dental office to know?”



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## Involvement of dental professionals in the community effort to foster change in family violence can make an important difference.

“What can we see in our dental examinations?”

“How do I approach cultural differences in my practice regarding family violence?”

“What is screening for domestic/intimate partner violence and a safety plan? Why is it important?”

“How do I collaborate with law enforcement, family violence advocates, and the community?”

“How is the special needs patient population impacted and how does that affect my practice?”

“Is there funding for dental care for victims of crime in California?”

In 2001, the California Dental Association Foundation (CDA Foundation) was established to promote the total health of Californians through oral health disease prevention, risk assessment and treatment initiatives. As the charitable arm of the CDA, the Foundation desires to expand healthcare and other California mandated reporter groups' knowledge of abuse and neglect that involves clinical implications for the oral and maxillofacial structure. Through a strategic partnership with, and generous funding from Blue Shield of California Foundation and Dental Benefit Providers, the Dental Professionals Against Violence (DPAV) was created. This program is the next generation of PANDA and CDA Abuse Detection and Education Program present in California since 1994.

DPAV consists of both Train-the-Trainer and direct provider training programs to encourage and support dental professionals in a practical response to family violence and to designed to assist dental professionals and their teams in recognizing and responding to child

### Forms to report abuse

Some copies of forms to report suspected abuse are included in this issue. These can be used as a “working draft” of the report form to assist the mandated reporter in collecting the information in an organized manner. It becomes much simpler to transfer information from the “working draft” to the formal report.

The actual child abuse forms are in NCR format. Please contact the California Department of Justice Bureau of Criminal Identification and Information, P.O. Box 90317, Sacramento, Calif., 94203-4170 to obtain actual forms.

#### Domestic Violence Form

[http://www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/medtrng/domain/Suspect\\_Violent\\_Injury.pdf](http://www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/medtrng/domain/Suspect_Violent_Injury.pdf)

#### Documentation Chart for Attempted Strangulation

e-mail: [gstrack@sandiego.gov](mailto:gstrack@sandiego.gov)

#### Dental Reimbursement

<http://www.boc.ca.gov/VCAApp.htm>

abuse/neglect, intimate partner violence, and elder abuse/neglect. The goals are to raise the dental community's awareness of family violence using the most current information regarding patient risk assessment, clinical signs and symptoms, and dental professional's legal obligation to identify and report elder, child and intimate partner abuse. The program includes definitive action steps for dental professionals to use in their practices and communities.

DPAV also created an educational poster for the dental office that was included in the April *Journal* to place in the back office to assist the team in recognizing and responding to abuse and neglect in the dental practice. To obtain additional free copies and/or to learn more about what you and your organization can do to respond to family violence, call the CDA Foundation's Dental Professionals Against Violence coordinator at (916) 554-4921, ext. 8900.

Involvement of dental professionals in the community effort to foster change in family violence can make an important difference by increasing the awareness of how to detect abuse, especially oral abuse, and to join the community effort. Community capacity to prevent abuse and neglect depends on the communication and collaboration of the entire community. Dentistry is prepared and willing to be collaborative partners with other healthcare providers, agencies, institutions, and policy makers in addressing domestic violence and family violence as a healthcare issue. The effect will be to positively impact children and their families. The victims of abuse often speak to us in non-verbal language through signs and symptoms. We have the opportunity to become their voice. We can make a difference. Now is the time. Family violence is not just a social issue; it is a health issue that affects us all.

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