

## Role of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeon in Detecting Domestic Violence

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### Abstract

Domestic violence is a grim reality, and is very much prevalent in our Indian society. Cases of violence against females are very common and most of the times they go unreported as the females feel hesitant in reporting this abuse.

Domestic violence can be of any type, it can be physical, sexual or emotional. Most of the times the victims of domestic violence are females, hence in this paper the issues are addressed keeping a female in mind.

As a health professional, an oral and maxillofacial surgeon is sometimes the first witness to domestic violence, hence as a responsible citizen it is our duty to report any such cases and get the concerned individual out of misery and suffering.

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### Introduction

According to a recent survey more than 70% of females have suffered domestic violence in some part of their lives. Domestic violence can be of physical, emotional or sexual type. As oral and maxillofacial surgeon it is our moral responsibility to report any such case and inform the concerned person where to go to seek justice. The face is the most common site affected by any sort of domestic violence, hence oral and maxillofacial surgeon can always suspect and inform the concerned authorities about the same<sup>1,2</sup>.

Some surgeons might feel that it is not their responsibility to address these type of issues and it is the responsibility of the NGO's and police to look into it, but what we should not forget is that we are very important part of the society and as a responsibility toward the society we should always report these cases and counsel the patient's.

The patient also finds it less intimidating to approach a surgeon than a police or other organizations.

### Materials and methods

In spite of many advances made in the last few decades, domestic violence still remains a grim reality in India. Almost every day we come across news of domestic violence. Most of the times these cases go unreported as the concerned person is afraid and is not sure who to approach. As Oral and Maxillofacial surgeon we are sometimes the first person to come in contact with a person of domestic violence. She might visit to seek some treatment for facial injuries or her general activities may raise a suspicion in the surgeon's mind. If we come across any such case we must report it to the concerned authorities and counsel the patient to report it.

### The Dental Environment

If a patient is accompanied by a relative, it may cause a disruption in communication regarding domestic violence between the surgeon and the patient because unfortunately most of the times the person accompanying may be the caregiver or person responsible for looking after the patient. Discussion should always be held in the absence of children<sup>5</sup>. The patient's undergoing maxillofacial treatment or examination are most of the time accompanied by any caregiver at the time of treatment, hence oral and maxillofacial surgeon is in a unique

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position to get the details regarding any domestic violence suffered by the patient<sup>6</sup>. To avoid any suspicion by the partner he may be sent to the reception for filling the forms, or to do any other sorts of formalities just to avoid any form of suspicion. It is of utmost importance that all the members of dental team recognize the issues of domestic violence and have an idea of how to deal with it<sup>7</sup>.

### Asking about domestic violence

It is not easy to ask about domestic violence directly, but the dental team must be proactive in recognizing the issues pertaining to domestic violence<sup>8</sup>. The treating oral and maxillofacial surgeon should just not be bothered about treating the injuries but should also be vigilant in looking for any other facial injuries. The cause of injury should always be ascertained and if the patient does not give a clear cut history a possibility of domestic violence must always be considered. Vague inquiries are not of any use hence clear cut information should be sought.

- Help create an environment that will facilitate disclosure of domestic violence
- Be aware of signs that could indicate a patient is experiencing domestic violence
- Know how to ask the right questions to let a patient know that she can talk about domestic violence.
- Validate and support patients who do not reveal domestic violence
- Be aware of support services and have written information available to pass to patients
- Provide the patient information whether or not she reveals domestic violence
- Keep accurate and detailed records of any injuries and information revealed
- Ensure confidentiality
- Treat physical dental injuries as appropriate.

**Table 1.** showing principles of practice for enquiring about domestic violence and referral to appropriate agencies. Adapted from Responding to domestic abuse: a handbook for health professionals<sup>3</sup>.

- Frequent appointments for vague complaints or symptoms
- Frequent missed appointments
- Partner always attends unnecessarily
- Injuries inconsistent with explanation of cause
- Multiple injuries at different stages of healing
- Woman tries to hide or minimize injuries
- Patient appears frightened, overly anxious or depressed
- Women is submissive or afraid or reluctant to speak in front of her partner
- Partner is aggressive or dominant, talks for a women or refuses to leave the room
- Non-compliance with treatment.

**Table 2.** Some likely indicators of domestic violence.

The likely indicators of domestic violence are mentioned in table 1 and 2. The reaction to domestic violence can be varied, while some patients may be aggressive and agitated, others may show a calm demeanor and be sweet and gentle. People inflicting domestic violence also do not always fit the stereotype, while some may be domineering and aggressive, other's may be sweet and charming.

### Respect and validation<sup>4</sup>

All health care workers should remember that their response to a person suffering from domestic violence is of utmost importance. It takes a women a very long time to reach a state where she is able to talk about the domestic violence she is suffering from to the health professional, in this case the oral and maxillofacial surgeon.

The manner in which the female is treated will determine whether she discloses more or is developing mistrust about the health professionals and is left to face domestic violence. When a patient makes any disclosure about domestic violence it is the duty of the operating surgeon that the information is kept confidential. The surgeon should not be judgmental and should always respect the ladies decision. The decision can be as drastic as to continuing to live with the abusive partner, but we have to respect this decision of the individual as there can be varied reasons behind the same.<sup>10</sup>

### Record keeping

The records of the person suffering from domestic violence must be safely kept. It might be used as a evidence if the person decides to move to the court of law. Confidentiality should be maintained, any records of a person suffering from domestic violence must be kept separately and confidentiality should be<sup>11</sup>. The physical safety and security of a victim of domestic violence may be dependent on the confidentiality of the records being maintained.<sup>12</sup>

### Our recommendations

- Formal training of the oral and maxillofacial surgeons to recognize the cases of domestic violence
- Contact numbers of the concerned authorities should be known to all the personals working in the clinic.
- Training of the staff to maintain the records safely and maintain the confidentiality of the records.
- The environment of the clinical set up should be calming and relaxing , so that the person feels at ease and is not hesitant in revealing their problems .
- Attention and lot of importance should be given to recording the case history of the patient.

- If any case of domestic violence comes to light, it should be reported to concerned authorities immediately.<sup>9</sup>

## Conclusions

As oral and maxillofacial surgeon's we are sometimes the first to come to know about the cases of domestic violence. If we come across any such case it is our moral responsibility to report about it to the concerned authorities and also to encourage the concerned person to report about the same.

## Declaration of Interest

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