Domestic Violence Resources on the Internet

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I haven’t shared much of my story with my doctors. I was afraid that they weren’t trained to deal with this subject, and my story is complicated. . . . I want doctors to be aware of agencies that assist victims, so that they can appropriately refer patients they believe could benefit from these services.

Anonymous

Domestic violence is a universal health care problem, affecting millions of individuals worldwide. In the United States alone, approximately 2 million women per year report abuse episodes. Due to the social stigma of domestic violence, lack of family and community support, risks of escalated violence, and an uncertain future after intervention, episodes are often not reported, especially in small towns, rural areas, and among same-sex or military populations. Because domestic violence has medical, socioeconomic, legal, and community considerations, a broad range of resources is often needed to address it appropriately. Yet despite the widespread nature of the problem, domestic violence resources, and access to them, vary widely among towns, counties, states, and countries. Although no substitute for direct interventions, the Internet and World Wide Web present opportunities to direct health professionals and their patients to useful resources that could contribute to improved management of this pressing problem.

The Internet is an increasingly important and accessible information source for health care professionals and their patients. Its advantages include global linkages that help overcome social and geographic isolation; chat rooms allowing interaction among those with similar interests; frequently updated information from international sources regarding medical, legal, financial, and social issues; and numerous professional resources. Disadvantages include the continued need for computer and Internet access and the ability to use them, technical limitations, difficulty determining the quality and accuracy of information retrieved, and privacy and confidentiality issues.

For victims, confidentiality can mean the difference between life and death, and they must be made aware that unless they use public terminals (eg, through a library or community center) or secure access on their home computers, their abusers could trace the Web sites they have visited or read their e-mail. Web searches can be time-consuming and frustrating as users try to select needed information from among the many sites available.

This article provides a listing and review of a number of relevant and useful medical, legal, and community-oriented sites that health care professionals may either reference or recommend to a patient. They are maintained by a variety of sources, including governmental offices or agencies, universities, and private organizations. Also available are personal Web pages that often include survivors’ stories and general information. In general, government and university sites present balanced information, with a high degree of accuracy. Commercial sites may promote a particular product or point of view, so their materials require greater analysis. Personal sites represent the opinion or experience of the individuals who created them, and so should be interpreted in that light.

ever, in some cases these survivors’ sites might provide more practical advice for some individuals than other more “official” sources.

MEDICAL SITES

Minnesota Center Against Violence & Abuse
http://www.umn.edu/mincava

The Minnesota Center Against Violence and Abuse, University of Minnesota, St Paul, is one of the most useful Web sources for information about domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, same-sex abuse, human rights abuse, violence in the workplace, men’s issues, school violence, violence in the religious community, media violence, and teen and gang violence. It includes extensive bibliographies, course curricula and training resources, news groups and discussion lists, legal reports, scholarly papers, funding agencies, and written exercises, with links to many of these sites.

Family Peace Project
http://www.family.mcw.edu/ahec/ec/medviol.html

This site, maintained by the Medical College of Wisconsin, provides clinical protocols for screening interviews, intervention options, and suggestions for working with victims of partner violence. It also suggests proper methods of “SOAP” note documentation and patient safety assessments, and includes discussion rooms concerning issues related to domestic violence, primarily for health care providers but also open to survivors.

Family Violence Prevention Fund
http://www.fvpf.org

This national, nonprofit organization focuses on domestic violence education, prevention, and public policy reform. Much of its information is health care oriented; the site includes basic information about domestic violence, updates on health care and legal initiatives, information about the organization’s national health initiative, survivors’ stories, and innovative programs across the United States.
Domestic Violence: A Practical Approach for Clinicians  
http://www.sfms.org/domestic.html

This site, maintained by the San Francisco Medical Society, addresses the background of domestic violence, including risks for and forms of domestic abuse, screening, diagnosis, clinical findings, interventions, patient safety issues, continuity of care, and documentation. It also focuses on how domestic violence is reported, which is a requirement in the state of California, although not necessarily in other parts of the country.

Medical Specialty Organizations

Many medical specialty groups maintain professional and public information on domestic violence issues on their Web sites, including practice and policy statements and available resources. These include the American College of Emergency Medicine at http://www.acep.org, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists at http://www.acog.org, the American Academy of Family Practice at http://www.aafp.org, and the American Academy of Pediatrics at http://www.aap.org.

LEGAL SITES

Nashville, Tenn, Police Department  
http://www.telalink.net/~police/abuse/index.html

The Domestic Violence Division of the Metro Nashville Police Department Web page is one of the more useful law-enforcement sites addressing this problem. It includes information about indicators of domestic violence, stress-related problems in children who witness abuse, progression of violence, signs of abuser rehabilitation, common characteristics of the batterer, symptoms of abuse, separation violence, long-term effects of domestic violence, safety plans for victims, information about orders of protection, workplace safety, and a copy of the department’s domestic violence policy.

American Bar Association  
Commission on Domestic Violence  
http://www.abanet.org/domviol/home.html

This site includes basic information about domestic violence, important phone numbers, hot links to related sites throughout the country, and updates about legal issues, confidentiality issues, and policies regarding domestic violence.

Justice Information Center  
http://www.ncjrs.org/victdvi.htm

The National Criminal Justice Reference Service Web site is a law-enforcement and social service site with conference transcripts, legislation, and general information about family violence, including intimate partner violence, child abuse, stalking, substance abuse, and female victims of violent crime.

US Department of Justice  
http://www.usdoj.gov/vawo

The US Department of Justice’s Violence Against Women site lists research, legislation, and resources pertaining to violence against women, including violence in the workplace. The full text of this monthly newsletter and its Domestic Violence Awareness Manual are available at this site.

GENERAL AND COMMUNITY SITES

Shattered Love Broken Lives  
Domestic Violence Main Menu  

The Standard-Times newspaper of New Bedford, Mass, ran this series of 60 articles about domestic violence in May and June 1995. Topics covered include an overview of domestic violence, survivor stories, police perspective on domestic violence, popular culture and sports in violence, the medical, legal, and religious responses to domestic violence, resources for women, issues about abusers, issues in schools, and suggested solutions.

Domestic Violence Information Center  
http://www.feminist.org/other/dv/dvhome.html

This site, offered by the Feminist Majority Foundation, provides links to numerous other sites, including phone numbers for each state’s Coalition Against Domestic Violence offices, information about the Violence Against Women Act, facts about domestic violence, and general references about domestic violence, self-defense, stalking, sexual harassment, and sexual assault.

Domestic Violence Shelters  
http://computrek.org/xx.htm  
(xx = state abbreviation)

This site provides domestic violence articles, stories submitted by perpetrators and survivors, and a bulletin board with chat rooms. It has a comprehensive state-by-state listing of local Coalitions Against Domestic Violence, local hot lines, counseling services, shelters, and victim service organizations. State-by-state listings of resources are available.

Same-Sex Domestic Violence  
http://www.qx.com/cuav/domviol.htm

The Community United Against Violence site has general information, biographies, and resources about same-sex abuse.

Nonviolent Alternatives  
http://www.tamoore.com/violence

The commercial site produced by “Nonviolent Alternatives” counseling services is one of the few geared toward the abuser. It provides general information about domestic violence, warning signs of abuse, and tips on nonviolent conflict resolution. It also provides hot links to numerous domestic violence resources.

Stop Abuse for Everyone (SAFE)  
http://www.dgp.utoronto.ca/~jade/safe

This site accessed through the University of Toronto server is directed to the public and includes domestic violence resources, ways to become involved in addressing domestic violence, and survivors’ stories. This site has more emphasis than most about violence against men by women.

Battered Women and Their Children  
http://www.columbia.edu/~rmh5

This social service site, based at the Columbia University, School of Social Work, New York, NY, provides online training manuals and participant workbooks for its training program for child protective and other social service professionals.

Electronic Journal of Intimate Violence (E-Mail Newsletter)  
http://alpha.acast.nova.edu/health/psy/file-desc/file50.html

This is a listserv to which people can subscribe to obtain e-mail information about child abuse, sexual abuse, spousal abuse, elder abuse, dating violence, and other similar issues.

References


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