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DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY

INTRODUCTION

This document provides guidance to GPS workers on responding effectively to service users, who are experiencing or have experienced domestic abuse.

DEFINITION OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

For the purposes of the policy, GPS recognises the government's definition of domestic abuse:

"Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality"

GPS recognises that domestic abuse is rarely confined to a single incident and typically forms a pattern if coercive or controlling behaviour. This policy is therefore applicable whatever the nature of the intimate relationship.

GPS recognises that the issue of forced marriage falls within the broad definition of domestic abuse and will treat any reported occurrence within this process.

Domestic abuse can go beyond actual physical violence. It can also involve emotional abuse, the destruction of a spouse's or partner's property, their isolation from friends, family or other potential sources of support, control over access to money, personal items, food, transportation, the telephone, and stalking. It can also include abuse inflicted on, witnessed by, or threatened against, children.

- Domestic abuse occurs in all social classes, cultures, and age groups whatever the sexual orientation, mental or physical ability.
- Once it has started it often becomes more frequent and more violent.
- It can severely affect children emotionally and physically.
- Victims are sometimes beaten or harassed by members of their immediate or extended family.
- Domestic abuse is gendered – most perpetrators are men and between 80-95% of those who experience it are women, although it does also occur against men in heterosexual relationships, in same sex relationships and against bisexual and transgender people.
- Domestic violence/abuse is not a 'one off' occurrence but is frequent and persistent, aimed at instilling fear into, and compliance from, the victim.

DESIGNATED PERSON

Client providers will have identified a domestic violence lead. This person will be a GP, who is trained to undertake this role. The responsibility of the domestic abuse lead should be to:

- Identify existing domestic abuse services available locally and nationally (a list of national organisations is provided in this document).
- Engage with local domestic abuse services to develop an effective working partnership.
- Organise training for their team.
- Establish a simple care pathway for patients, who disclose domestic abuse.
- Provide a single point of reference, and information, with regards to domestic abuse to ensure (a) legal compliance (b) single information stream both within the client provider and for external agencies.
- Ensure that their organisation response to disclosure always adheres to its information sharing protocols.
- Posters giving helpline advice notices should be available on the notice board, website and in the patient leaflets

If you suspect abuse whilst on GPS business, please visit the client provider's domestic abuse policy to identify their lead.

The initial assessment for a service user, who discloses domestic abuse or where domestic abuse is suspected, can be carried out by the designated person or by an external specialist domestic abuse service practitioner, who undertakes the assessment on behalf of providers and liaises with the GP / domestic abuse lead.

DOMESTIC ABUSE CARE PATHWAY

GPS workers and client providers are expected to:

- Recognise service whose symptoms mean they might be more likely to be experiencing domestic abuse.
- Talk to the service user sensitively and provide a safe and empathetic first response.
- Understand the process for responding to disclosure and know what to do when there is an immediate risk of harm to the service user and their children.
- Know who the designated person is and seek advice where necessary.
- Understand the client providers process for arranging an initial assessment with the designated person.
- Document domestic abuse in the service users record safely and keep records for evidence purposes.
- Share information appropriately. Information must only be shared with the consent of the service user, subject to the policy on child protection and adult safeguarding. In exceptional circumstances, information may be shared without the service users consent e.g. cases considered at Multi-Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) meetings, which are the most serious cases of alleged or suspected domestic abuse.

INITIAL ASSESSMENT

When undertaking an initial assessment of the service user, the designated person will:

- Conduct a risk assessment – e.g. using the document available at this website:
<http://www.safelives.org.uk/node/516>

Advise the service user about available services according to the level of risk assessed. This may result in:

- The service user becoming part of the designated person's own case load, if they are a specialist domestic abuse practitioner.
 - Referral to an appropriate local specialist domestic abuse service if the service user consents or a referral to a counsellor.
 - Signposting to domestic abuse resources and provision of a basic safety plan if the service user is unwilling to engage with services at this time.
- Ensure that child protection and adult safeguarding procedures are initiated where required, especially where there is immediate risk of harm to service user and their children.

TRAINING REQUIREMENTS FOR GPS WORKERS

All GPS workers – clinical and non-clinical – are trained in how to recognise the signs of domestic abuse, how to enquire sensitively and safely, the importance of confidentiality and the GPS's process for responding to disclosure.

Training covers:

- Initial education about domestic abuse - RCGP e-learning module.
- Health indications of domestic abuse e.g. depression, anxiety, tiredness, chronic pain
- How to ask the question sensitively and safely.
- The implications of domestic abuse for both child protection and adult safeguarding.
- How to respond in cases of immediate and significant risk (i.e. where it may not be safe to go home).
- How to document domestic abuse and manage service user notes safely.
- The protocols of information sharing, consent, and confidentiality.
- Local domestic abuse response pathways for all levels of risk.
- What to do when a perpetrator discloses or is also registered with the client provider.

The following document provides guidance on a range of these topics:

<http://www.rcgp.org.uk/clinical-and-research/clinical-resources/domestic-violence.aspx>

DIRECTORY OF DOMESTIC ABUSE SERVICES

National services	
24 hour national domestic violence help-line – run in partnership between Women’s Aid and Refuge – service for women experiencing domestic abuse	0808 2000 247 www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk
Men’s advice line – service for men experiencing domestic abuse	0808 801 0327 http://www.mensadvice.org.uk/
Women’s Aid	Advice line as above – 0808 2000 247 www.womensaid.org.uk
Respect phoneline (for those who are abusive or violent towards their partner)	0808 802 4040 www.respectphoneline.org.uk
Local services	
Add local details of MARAC co-ordinator and specialist services	
Support for healthcare professionals	
IRIS	www.irisdomesticviolence.org
Safe Lives	0117 403 3220 info@safelives.org.uk www.safelives.org.uk/