



F24 Diagnosing and Reporting Abuse in the Dental Office: Recommended Procedures in Switzerland

Michel M. Perrier, MS, Institute of Forensic Medicine, University of Lausanne Switzerland, Av de Rumine 7, Lausanne, 1005, SWITZERLAND; and Beat Horisberger, MD, University Lausanne, Institute of Legal Medicine, Rue du Bugnon 21, Lausanne, SWITZERLAND*

After attending this presentation, attendees will be able to evaluate a method of reporting abuse cases diagnosed in a dental office.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by showing the importance of training dentists in detecting and reporting an increasing problem of public health.

Diagnosing a case of abuse can be a difficult task for dentists and their staff. It requires knowledge and familiarity with signs that might indicate violence without jumping to conclusions. Diagnosing physical abuse is the first step of a systematic procedure. It needs a particular specialized training and knowledge to link detected injuries and the behavior of the patient and/or the accompanying person(s). The etiological factors of the injury must be determined as to be either accidental or non-accidental event. The delicate initiation of a discussion with the patient regarding a situation of abuse should include pertinent questions in a professional atmosphere of confidentiality with an evaluation of the discerning capacity of the presumed victim.

Reporting such a situation has to be systematic and compatible with the local and/or national legal requirements. Any report of suspected child abuse should include exact information regarding the victim with diagrams and photographs of the injuries. All observations should be clearly mentioned and commented. However, the author of the report should avoid any personal investigation and/or conclusions.

Responding to a situation of domestic abuse to an adult requires an evaluation of the cognitive ability of the presumed victim. The interview should include documented assistance referrals and contacts to seek help and support about violence.

Dentists are generally confronted with patients whose age range from children to the elderly. They see their patients on a regular basis and/or during an emergency service. They are in the front line to diagnose signs of abuse as 65% or more of the lesions linked to abuse appear in the head, face, neck and other visible parts of the body such as hands and arms. Unfortunately, some studies and results show that reports coming from dentists are very scarce compared to those coming from other health professionals such as physicians, nurses, caretakers, medical examiners or social workers. This may be due mainly to a lack of basic training during the undergraduate and during most of the postgraduate training programs.

This lack of training should be addressed as child abuse and domestic violence among partners and older people has become an alarming issue in public health.

The Swiss federal law requires the duty to report cases of child abuse by health professionals and dentists belong to this category. In some of the 26 different cantons of the country, it is even an obligation to report. Additional law on the assistance to offended victims came into effect in 1993. This law encourages the creation of violence prevention programs and specific consultation for victims of interpersonal violence. These centers inform victims on rights and duties and evaluate risk.

As abuse cases are increasing, dentists should become more aware of the risk of being confronted to a non-accidental problem. Careful observation of a patient's symptoms, his or her behavior, appearance, and ability to communicate is a very important part of any dental visit. **Forensic Odontology, Abuse, Dental Traumatology**