

The Power of Innovation

A health care system to meet our needs
NSW Health
 Symposium Oct 2012

NBMLHD Forensic Medical Unit Domestic Violence Injury Documentation Project, Collaboration – Working as a Team

Introduction

Penrith LGA had the fourth highest recorded number of DV presentations to Police in NSW.

Intimate partner violence, amongst women aged 18-44 years, is a larger risk factor for morbidity and mortality than obesity, nicotine and hypertension.

Prior to the project, DV injuries were documented by GPs or Emergency Department staff with little or no forensic training, insufficient time, and lacking appropriate equipment for thorough documentation.

Aim

To provide high quality forensic evidence for victims of Domestic Violence to ensure a fair outcome in NSW Courts.

To provide specialised Domestic Violence services with appropriate referrals for ongoing support for the victim.

Method

The project started as a trial in December 2008.

Victims of DV could book an appointment for a forensic assessment. With their consent a package was prepared for NSW police. This included:

- Documentation of injuries
- Forensic History
- Expert Certificate
- Examiner's attendance at Court as an Expert Witness, if required.

35 patients as well as police officers, crime managers and police prosecutors from St Marys and Penrith LACs participated in confidential interviews to determine the success of the project

Results

- Enhanced evidence before the Courts
- Increased likelihood of successful convictions (77% V 52%)
- Decreased time for finalisation of matters
- Increased perpetrator accountability
- Evidence more available from FMU than from GPs, ED staff
- Improved safety outcomes
- "It's invaluable in the way it's presented; it's very thorough. It is my impression that, quite often, that kind of evidence persuades the perpetrator to plead guilty" [police prosecutor].

Benefits identified by DV patients:

- "When I looked at the pictures they took of me it felt like I was looking at someone else. It had happened so many times but this time I could see how someone else would see it, abuse."
- "It made a lot of difference. It showed me the damage done and it made me see the perpetrator is responsible. I stopped minimising his actions. It made me feel validated."

Conclusion

"The FMU does good work. It is of high quality but I don't see enough of it". [Police prosecutor].

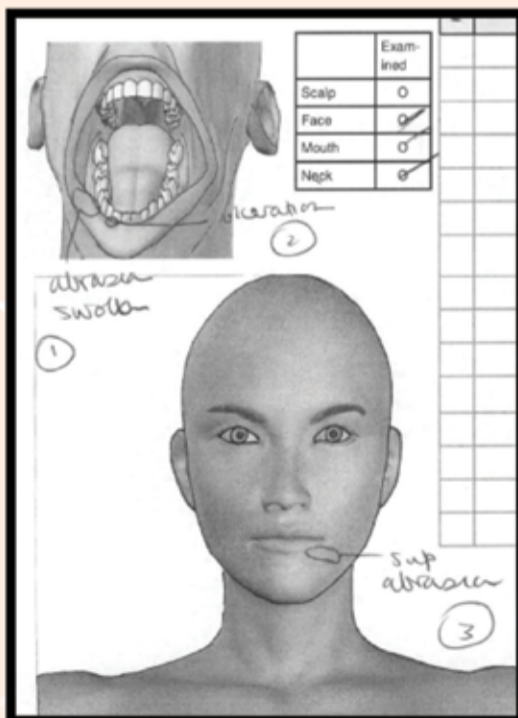
"It's the best executed pilot I have ever been involved in with the least amount of resources or time spent for the benefit gained". [Police officer]

There are 5 other sexual assault units in NSW with permanent medical and nursing staff trained in forensic documentation. With some support their role could be extended to other victims of assault with little additional cost to the system.

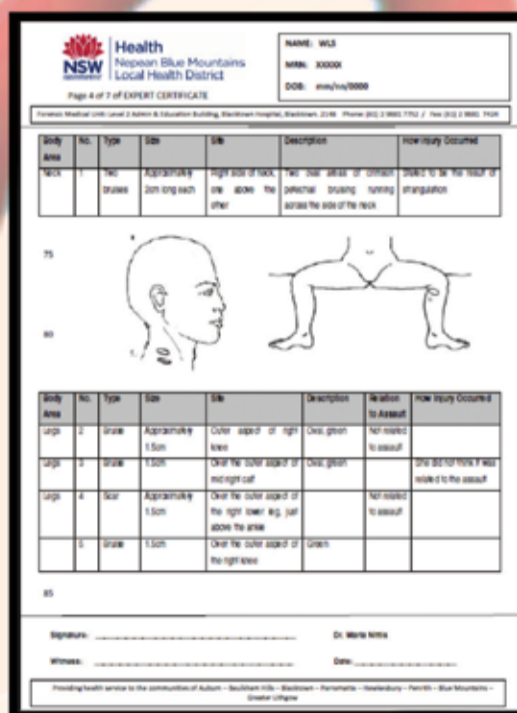
Acknowledgements

A huge debt of gratitude to the police officers at Penrith and St Marys Local Area Command (especially Crime Managers Grant Healey and Daryl Jobson) for making this project a possibility and providing judicial outcomes for a range of victims.

Our gratitude also to Mr Rod Hughes, Research Officer, who assisted in preparation of the extensive documentation required for Ethics approval, conducted the reviews of police and analysed the outcomes.



Documentation on Body Diagrams



Expert Certificates for Court



Health
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 Local Health District

