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Hospital domestic violence screening protocols

COLLEEN MOORE: Since the joint commission [The Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, or JCAHO] requires screening but doesn't specify exactly what that screening content has to be, in a lot of facilities, they look for behavioral or physical indicators as opposed to asking direct questions. So they might come in and they size you up, and they figure you're not in a risk group, you're not presenting with an injury, you're probably be ok. But really what the best practice is to be asking universally, not to make assumptions based on gender, based on age, based on race, to ask the questions, and to make sure you're looking for those indicators as well. So if somebody comes in and they have a broken arm, and they're not disclosing any type of abuse, it's appropriate to ask again in another way. To put it in terms of, "this is something we ask of everyone because it's such a common problem," or for a doctor to say, "you know, I've seen an injury like this before are you sure no one did that to you." Another way of screening is just to be aware of what the injury is and does it really kind of sit well with kind of what the explanation is, and you can probe a little, you can ask a little . Even if the person is not disclosing the abuse, they're taking in information they would learn that there could be help resource available to them.

The questions

COLLEEN MOORE: Here at Mercy we ask three questions related to personal safety. We ask a question that relates to, sort of generally, to physical or emotional abuse, recognizing that emotional abuse can have just as many harmful effects on your health as physical abuse. We do ask the question that delineates specific behaviors. Many people don't somehow see strangulation as abuse, so if you point out kicking, choking, punching, we ask a question like that, that spells everything out. And we ask a third question, which is just asking have you ever been in a relationship in which you've felt threatened or afraid.