

A dedicated domestic violence support service in A&E

The REACH Domestic Violence service provides dedicated advice, advocacy and support in Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital Accident and Emergency department. The service provides a standardised referral pathway and ensures that domestic violence victims receive sensitive and timely support.

“Busy A&E teams can find it very difficult to offer the support that victims of domestic violence need. By offering a ‘one-stop shop’ for advice and referrals, REACH is able to improve care for both victims and other A&E patients.”

Laura Stretch, REACH Service Manager



Recognising the need for a dedicated domestic violence service

Many hospitals offer domestic abuse services in their maternity departments, where victims of domestic violence and abuse can be identified and referred for specialist support.

The staff at Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust recognised the need for a dedicated service for both male and female victims of domestic violence in the Accident and Emergency department, where it may be identified or disclosed that abuse is occurring. In busy A&E teams, identification and support for victims of domestic violence can be variable and depend on a number of factors. This includes how busy the department is, which members of staff are available, and if they have received training.

NICE guidance on domestic violence and abuse (PH50) recommends that frontline staff are trained to recognise the signs of domestic violence and abuse, and to ask relevant questions to help people disclose their experiences. REACH provides domestic violence awareness training to all Trust A&E staff.

Working with A&E staff to provide a seamless service

The REACH service supports both patients and Trust staff and students, and accepts referrals from any part of the hospital. The service is also dedicated to supporting those who may experience difficulties accessing services, including those in same-sex and transgender relationships.

REACH provides:

- Training for all new A&E nurses, doctors, and placement students
- A standardised referral pathway for staff to follow
- Ongoing support once victims have been discharged from A&E
- Support to Trust staff who are victims of domestic violence and abuse
- A multi-lingual staff member

The REACH team worked with A&E staff to provide support during busy periods and out of hours. “We saw a 200% increase in referrals during the World Cup,” explained Laura Stretch, REACH Service Manager. “We extend our hours during busy periods, such as bank holidays, Christmas, and New Year's Day, and REACH services are available between 8am and 6pm to allow for a handover period between REACH and A&E night staff.”

Improving immediate care and long-term support

Before REACH there was no standard service for domestic violence victims. By providing training and a ‘one-stop shop’ for advice and support, REACH has simplified the referral pathway. This means that victims are able to get the support they need quicker, freeing up clinical staff to treat other patients.

REACH also provides ongoing support to patients after they have been discharged from A&E. The REACH team works closely with partners in Child Protection and Safeguarding Adults' and other relevant local services when additional services are required. Less than 5% of REACH service users experience repeat domestic violence incidents and almost 50% of REACH clients report their experiences to the police, compared to just 16% of unsupported victims.

Laura Stretch said “REACH has significantly improved long-term support for domestic violence survivors of all ages. We refer people aged from 13 to 89, which really shows the need for more services that accept a diversity of referrals.”

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