

# ASSESSING

Dental hygienists are professionals who are committed to the total health and wellbeing of their patients. The Canadian dental hygiene regulatory authorities encourage all dental hygienists to practise with sensitivity and respect. A dental hygiene appointment may be an opportunity for both the dental hygienist and the patient to have discussion about any domestic violence the patient may have suffered. Dental hygienists must not only be aware of signs of injuries a patient may have suffered but must be encouraged to initiate and offer support so the issue of domestic violence does not remain hidden.

Assessment is part of every dental hygiene appointment. A complete and thorough medical history is the starting point of any dental hygiene assessment. Medical history forms should include a question asking if one has ever suffered or currently suffers from domestic violence.

As dental hygienists do a head and neck assessment of each patient, it is an opportunity to look for sign and symptoms which might occur as the result of domestic violence. You should be assessing for:

- ◆ any bruising (new or fading) on the face and neck
- ◆ cuts
- ◆ unexplained scarring
- ◆ issues with the temporomandibular joint (TMJ)
- ◆ unusual tenderness or pain with palpation of the glands and nodes of the head and neck
- ◆ any unexplained facial injury

As the dental hygienist continues the assessment phase, an intra-oral assessment is done. You should be assessing for:

- ◆ cut lips
- ◆ fractured teeth
- ◆ unexplained bruising or scarring of the soft tissue
- ◆ oral manifestations of sexually transmitted diseases
- ◆ any unexplained injury or trauma inside the mouth
- ◆ any triggers for a woman who has suffered sexual abuse (a dental appointment can imitate certain sexual abuses)
- ◆ if a patient's reaction to care appears to be disproportionate to what you think is going on

***If a woman's partner insists on sitting in on the appointment, it may be an indication s/he does not want to leave her alone to have a private conversation about any injuries that may be present. In cases where there is not a cultural reason for the partner's presence, it may be a flag that something else is going on.***