

FACT SHEET



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Medical Responses to Adults Who Have Experienced Sexual Assault : an Interactive Educational Module for Doctors

What is it?

- RANZCOG's new educational module—*Medical Responses to Adults Who Have Experienced Sexual Assault*—is an interactive educational module for doctors designed to prepare them to respond to patients who have been sexually assaulted.
- *Medical Responses to Adults Who Have Experienced Sexual Assault* is a detailed, interactive 150 page training handbook with questions and case studies designed to be incorporated into both GP and specialist training programs.
- The module has been developed and published by the RANZCOG to assist and educate medical practitioners across the board. It is intended for doctors and specialists training in public and private hospitals and those in private practice.
- *Medical Responses to Adults Who Have Experienced Sexual Assault* is intended to be included in the postgraduate training (beyond the basic medical degree) of GPs and specialists. The Module includes both self-assessment and external assessment components.

Why was it developed?

Prevalence, incidence & research

- It is estimated that one in four women and one in eight men experience sexual assault during their lifetime, though many instances of sexual assault are never reported. It is also estimated that one in three women and one in six men experienced sexual assault in their childhood [summary estimates of figures from Women's Health Statewide, South Australia].
- Appropriate medical responses to care and treatment for patients who have experienced sexual assault is critical to continuing health outcomes across the patient's lifespan.
- Research in the UK has found that 'Better knowledge and enlightened attitudes amongst health care staff can have a significant impact on the management of sexual assault and influence the likelihood of victims presenting for treatment' (Williams *et al*, 1999).
- Identification of sexual assault is now also being recognised as crucial. Many patients want to discuss their experience (Kimberg, 2000), but do not because their doctors do not ask (Mazza *et al*, 1996);

Holmes, 1999). When doctors ask about sexual assault, they need to be adequately prepared to respond appropriately to the patient by providing the right primary care and knowing where to refer the patient for further assistance.

Need

- Research demonstrates that very few victim/survivors of sexual assault will access the legal system; most victim/survivors will however, have regular or frequent contact with the healthcare system. Sexual assault impacts enormously upon the health of victim/survivors not just directly and immediately but often compounding as years pass (Duncan, 2002). With appropriate training backed by evidence based research and that includes addressing major health outcomes, essential skills and referral pathways, practitioner attitudes, and practitioner self-care, doctors are well positioned to respond.
- The costs of sexual assault to individuals and to the community cannot be underestimated. In June 2004 Vichealth released findings of a project designed to estimate the burden of disease associated with physical violence perpetrated against women in intimate relationships, including sexual assault. In the first study of its kind in the world this work sets the context for medical responses to violence against women with the finding that intimate partner violence including sexual violence 'is responsible for more ill-health and premature death in Victorian women under the age of 45 than any other of the well-known risk factors, including high blood pressure, obesity and smoking'. Access Economics estimated in 2004 that domestic violence including sexual violence costs the Australian economy \$1.8 billion annually.
- Violence against women is one of seven key priority health issues identified by the National Women's Health Policy developed by the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council (AHMAC). Inappropriate care of victim/survivors of sexual assault is recognised by AHMAC as a significant medical and social problem that demanded the development of an educational training module for doctors to raise standards of care.

How was it developed?

- *Medical Responses to Adults Who Have Experienced Sexual Assault* was developed by the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG) at the request of the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council (AHMAC) and on behalf of the Committee of Presidents of Medical Colleges (CPMC).
- CPMC, responding to AHMAC's suggestion of the importance of introducing education in the care of sexual assault victim/survivors for residents and registrars in obstetrics and gynaecology (o and g) in particular, recommended that such training be provided for trainee doctors in emergency medicine, general practice, surgery, paediatrics and psychiatry as well as o and g.
- The RANZCOG convened an expert working party consisting of experts in the field and representatives of medical colleges who saw that they had a role to play in the development of the module. Numerous specialist advisors have contributed throughout several draft stages of the Module.

Who developed it?

- The RANZCOG-convened working party oversaw curriculum development, content and educational design. Participants in the working party were:
 - Lyndall Boucher Royal College of Pathologists Australia (RCPA)
 - Dr Sheila Bryan Australian College of Emergency Medicine (ACEM)
 - Kerren Clark Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG)
 - Dr Deborah Colville Royal Australian College of Surgeons (RACS)
 - Ms Marg D’Arcy CASA House (Centre Against Sexual Assault) (replacing Rachael Green)
 - Dr Sheila Knowlden Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP)
 - Dr Eleanor Long Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG)
 - Dr Michael O’Connor Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG)
 - Dr Sue Packer Royal Australian College of Physicians (Division of Paediatrics)
 - Professor Neil Paget Royal Australian College of Physicians (RACP)
 - Dr Carolyn Quadrio Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP)
 - Dr Alexandra Welborn Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine (VIFM)
 - Dr Lyndall Young National Adult Sexual Assault Medical Committee (NASAMC)
- Expert advisors included:
 - Susan Moore Coordinator, Sexual Assault Referral Centre, Darwin
 - Dr Kathleen McNamee Family Planning Victoria.
 - Rose Solomon Elizabeth Hoffman House
 - Nerida Sutherland Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service
 - Sheri Lawson Project Worker—DAFSA, and Counsellor Advocate, CASA House
 - Dr Sarah Lantz Centre for Adolescent Health, University of Melbourne
 - Prof Suzanne Garland Royal Women’s Hospital, Melbourne
 - Dr Carol Shand Doctors for Sexual Assault Care, New Zealand
 - Prof Peter Stone National Women’s Hospital, New Zealand
 - Dr Ian Denham Melbourne Sexual Health Centre
- Managing editor and contributor: Liz Olle. Major contributors: Marg D’Arcy, Lyndall Young and Alexandra Welborn with Carolyn Quadrio, Sheila Knowlden, Sue Packer, Sheila Bryan, & Kerren Clark.

How can I obtain a copy?

- *Medical Responses to Adults Who Have Experienced Sexual Assault* is available from the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists for \$50 (plus GST).
- Please see www.ranzcog.edu.au/sexual-assault-module for more information.