



● Bahrain looking to ease burden on overstretched hospitals and health centres



● Private hospitals being urged to help take load off state health service

health service...



● .Salmaniya Medical Complex...flagship hospital

play a crucial role in combating abuse, since health workers were usually the first point of contact for victims.

"Some healthcare providers think their role is only to provide medical treatment, but they must know that they are also there to support and educate the community and build self-esteem and give the resources available," said Dr Al Mutawa.

"Doctors, social workers and health centres need to recognise victims of abuse and know which places they can refer them to for help."

She said several women's societies offered help and free legal advice, in addition to the Dar Al Aman shelter for abused women, Batelco Care Centre for Family Violence Cases and Aisha Yateem Family Counselling Centre.

However, she added the extent of domestic abuse in Bahrain was unknown, since few

women were willing to talk about.

"We are the first point of contact for women who are abused or in danger of abuse and many come with physical problems, but don't say it was from abuse," said Dr Al Mutawa.

"Most patients don't say and even deny they are being abused and if they go to the hospital with something they are often accompanied by the abuser, so the data we have is not complete."

She said abuse in Bahrain was extremely underestimated, even though a study conducted by the Supreme Council for Women found 95pc of women were aware that abuse existed in the community.

"It is very difficult to do studies, but we can see from our experience that so many women come for psychiatric problems, tension headaches, stress and depression and this is related to the abuse," said Dr Al Mutawa.

"So using these guidelines, the physician can ask how is the relationship with her husband and children and then ask if there is any abuse - physical or mental.

"At all levels of society women feel embarrassed and are reluctant to talk about it, unless we ask."

She said although the Health Ministry was the primary government body dealing with abuse cases, all ministries, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other stakeholders needed to play a role in helping to combat abuse.

"We must reach police officers, the Justice Ministry and religious people, as these people play a big role in society," she said.

"If the society is brought up thinking that abuse is normal, that the man is the leader and that even minor abuse is normal, then we need to bring these people (religious) in to change

this mentality because abuse is not accepted in any religion."

The guidelines are available in English and Arabic on the Health Ministry's intranet and in hard copy at the ministry and health centres.

They cover various topics, such as what abuse is and the role of healthcare providers.

The guidelines are mainly aimed at primary healthcare providers but they will also be rolled out to all services in the ministry and later to private institutions.

The Health Ministry will soon launch a booklet for women on how to avoid abuse and what to do if they are abused.

Brochures with details of where abused women can go for help are available at the ministry and health centres. Similar guidelines will be launched to help healthcare providers protect children from abuse.