Health-Care Pro Discusses the Many Warning Signs

In the United States, women are assaulted or beaten once every nine seconds; worldwide, one in three women have been battered, raped or otherwise abused in her lifetime, according to women's advocacy organizations.

"That means most of us – while grocery shopping, at work or at home – come across several women a day who have either been abused, or are currently enduring abuse," says Linda O'Dochartaigh, a health professional and author of Peregrine (www.lavanderkatbooks.com). "It's a terrible fact of life for too many women, but if there is something we can do about it and we care about fellow human beings, then we must try."

There are several abuse resources available to women who are being abused, or friends of women who need advice, including:

- TheHotline.org , National Domestic Violence Hotline, open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, 1-800-799-SAFE (7223)

- HelpGuide.org , provides unbiased, advertising-free mental health information to give people the self-help options to help people understand, prevent, and resolve life's challenges

- VineLink.com , allows women to search for an offender in custody by name or identification number, then register to be alerted if the offender is released, transferred, or escapes

- DAHMW.org , 1-888-7HELPLINE, offers crisis intervention and support services for victims of intimate partner violence and their families

Perhaps the best thing friends and family can do for a woman enduring domestic abuse is to be there for her – not only as a sympathetic ear, but also as a source of common sense that encourages her to take protective measures, O'Dochartaigh says. Before that, however, loved

ones need to recognize that help is needed.

O'Dochartaigh reviews some of the warning signs:

• Clothing – Take notice of a change in clothing style or unusual fashion choices that would allow marks or bruises to be easily hidden. For instance, someone who wears long sleeves even in the dog days of summer may be trying to hide signs of abuse.

• Constant phone calls – Many abusers are very controlling and suspicious, so they will call their victims multiple times each day to "check in." This is a subtle way of manipulating their victims, to make them fearful of uttering a stray word that might alert someone that something is wrong. Many abusers are also jealous, and suspect their partner is cheating on them, and the constant calls are a way of making sure they aren't with anyone they aren't supposed to be around.

• Unaccountable injuries – Sometimes, obvious injuries such as arm bruises or black eyes are a way to show outward domination over the victim. Other times, abusers harm areas of the body that won't be seen by family, friends and coworkers.

• Frequent absences – Often missing work or school and other last-minute plan changes may be a woman hiding abuse, especially if she is otherwise reliable.

• Excessive guilt & culpability – Taking the blame for things that go wrong, even though she was clearly not the person responsible – or she is overly-emotional for her involvement – is a red flag.

• Fear of conflict – Being brow-beaten or physically beaten takes a heavy psychological toll, and anxiety bleeds into other relationships.

• Chronic uncertainty – Abusers often dominate every phase of a victim's life, including what she thinks she likes, so making basic decisions can prove challenging.

About Linda O'Dochartaigh

Linda O'Dochartaigh has worked in health care is an advocate for victims of child abuse and domestic violence. She wants survivors to know that an enriched, stable and happy life is available to them. O'Dochartaigh is the mother of three grown children and is raising four adopted grandchildren.