

Virginia Department of Health: Office of the Chief Medical Examiner

Virginia Domestic Violence Fatality Review Newsletter

Join us for the 2013 Virginia DVFR Meet & Greet Event!

Welcoming all current team leadership, as well as those interested in exploring fatality review in their community:

DVFR Meet & Greet

Thursday, February 7th

10am-3pm

At the OCME's Fatality Review and Surveillance Unit offices in Richmond.

Contact Emma Duer for more information, or to RSVP (emma.duer@vdh.virginia.gov; see Page 4 for full contact info)

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The Year in Review: Virginia DVFR in 2012

There are currently 17 Domestic Violence Fatality Review (DVFR) Teams operating around the state with government endorsement. Of these teams, 11 convened during 2012 for case review, with each team meeting between 2 and 6

times. Active teams carried memberships ranging from 8 to 25 individuals, with the average team holding around 19 members. Teams conducting case review completed between 2 and 8 cases each in 2012, averaging about 3

cases per team per year. In addition, at least 11 other localities receive ongoing assistance from the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) in exploring fatality review in their communities.

New in Research

Emergency Department Resources and IPV Diagnosis

A [study in the *European Journal of Emergency Medicine*](#) found that EDs' mandatory screening and victim advocate programs were the most common resources available to patients, but were not associated with rates of IPV diagnosis. The authors concluded that while most common hospital-level resources did not improve diagnosis rates, standardized intervention checklists were found to be positively associated.

Sobriety Project Reduces DV Arrests in South Dakota

A [study in the *American Journal of Public Health*](#) found that an innovative alcohol monitoring program imposed upon alcohol-involved offenders in South Dakota helps reduce domestic vio-

lence arrests. The "24/7 Sobriety Project" utilizes frequent alcohol testing and swift moderate sanctions, and was associated with a 9% reduction in county-level DV arrests over the first 6 years of the program.

Children's Behavioral Problems Improve When IPV Stops

A retrospective [study published in *JAMA Pediatrics*](#) found that while children exposed to IPV by their caregivers are more likely to have behavioral difficulties such as depression, withdrawal, and aggression, children whose caregivers reported cessation of the abuse during follow-up showed improved psychological outcomes up to 7 years later.

Mental Disorders Linked with Domestic Violence

A [new meta-analysis](#) of worldwide

statistics in the journal *PLoS One* found that both men and women with mental health problems are at an increased risk of domestic violence. While previous research has found a link between depression and domestic violence in women, this review shows a similar increase in risk for all types of mental disorders, including OCD, eating disorders, and schizophrenia.

Technology Aids in Collaborative Child Fatality Review

Results of a [pilot test in the journal *Injury Prevention*](#) showed that according to informant interviews, a web-based Telecenter appliance was successful in facilitating trainings and improved communication and collaboration, thus enhancing efficient case review and preventive efforts by a child fatality review team in Philadelphia.

This February 14th, the **ONE BILLION RISING** campaign will organize demonstrations around the world to end violence against women and girls:
www.onebillionrising.org

"We recently underwent some strategic changes allowing the group to review [all cases each year]. Prior to this year, the team had reviewed 4 cases in 4 years and had not had a chance to make any recommendations or determine any trends in the cases."

-Sandy Bromley, Fairfax County DVFR Team, now preparing to publish their first annual report in February.

2013 Virginia General Assembly Hears Bills on Gun Control, Lethality Assessment

The [General Assembly](#) is scheduled to hear the following bills related to Domestic Violence:

SB1061 to establish an evidence-based lethality assessment program for first responders.

SB864 to ban possession or transportation of a firearm while the subject of an emergency protective order.

HB1410 to ban possession or transportation of a firearm within a five-year period following a DV-related conviction.

Technical Assistance in Case Review: How to Involve Family Members

Family members, friends, and other survivors have knowledge that may be extremely valuable for the case review process. However, teams often feel hesitant about how to contact victims in a way that is sensitive to their grief, but might still result in helpful information-gathering for the team. Here are some tips:

1. Send a sympathy card or letter, offering condolences; let them know the team will be discussing the case, and

invite them to provide any thoughts, memories, or points of view about the loss of their loved one.

2. Allow adequate time and privacy for an interview to take place; you might start by asking "Tell me about (deceased); what was he/she like?"
3. Interview family members and other acquaintances one at a time; interviewing survivors together can be prob-

lematic due to differences in perspective and access to information.

4. Don't forget about the perpetrator and his/her family; they too can provide valuable information.

See the Virginia OCME's [Family and Intimate Partner Violence Fatality Review: Team Protocol and Resource Manual](#) for a sample protocol and list of interview questions.

New Strangulation Law Resulting in Arrests

Six months after a new state law was enacted making strangulation a felony, law enforcement agencies in the Hampton Roads area are reporting more than 100 arrests made, according to a [recent report by Laurie Simmons](#) for WTKR News.

According to the National Strangulation Training Institute, strangulation is "one of the most lethal forms of domestic violence and sexual assault" and a strong predictor of domestic violence homicide. The Institute provides online resources, training, and

technical assistance to family violence professionals. Their website features a free online training on Investigating Strangulation Crimes: www.strangulationtraininginstitute.com

Annual Report on Domestic and Sexual Violence

The Office of the Attorney General's 2012 [Annual Report on Domestic and Sexual Violence in Virginia](#) provides an overview of statistics, programs, and activities to address domestic and sexual violence across the state. Highlights from this year's report include:

- An update on the Office of the Executive Secretary of the Supreme Court of VA's ex-

pansion of the I-CAN! Program, which 507 users accessed January-September to print the forms necessary to petition for a protective order.

- 7 grant programs were administered in the state, including the DV Prevention and Services Program, Sexual Assault Grant Program, Community Defined Solutions to Violence Against Women Grant, V-

STOP Violence Against Women Grant, Sexual Violence Prevention Programming Grant, VA Sexual and DV Victim Fund, and Victim/Witness Program Grants.

- In addition to new state laws regarding strangulation, the 2012 General Assembly passed three new bills clarifying the protective order process.

What the Numbers are Telling Us: Highlights from 4th Quarter Publications

United States

- The November [*Special Report on Intimate Partner Violence, 1993-2010*](#) from the U.S. Department of Justice found that the overall rate of IPV declined during that period by 64%, from 9.8 to 3.6 victimizations per 1,000 persons age 12 or older.
- An estimate of family and IPV-related homicides based on the FBI's [*2012 Preliminary Semiannual Uniform Crime Report*](#) totals 2,483 homicides committed in 2011 by a family member, significant other, or caregiver. These cases represent approximately 1 in every 5 homicide.

Virginia

- Olivia Gillies from the Virginia OCME's [*FIP Homicide Surveillance Project*](#) is currently working on 2011 cases. To date, 135 DV homicides have been identified; a final report on 2011 cases will be published in March.
- The September report [*Domestic Violence in Virginia 2006-2010*](#) from the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services found that during this period the overall number of victims of violent crime increased by 1% in the state, while the number of victims of DV increased by almost 9% (49,087 to 53,294).

Have Sexual Abuse and Physical Abuse Declined Since the 1990s?

In November 2012, the [*Crimes Against Children Research Center*](#) released a report analyzing trends in data on rates of sexual and physical abuse, and agreed that the apparent decline in sexual abuse from 1992 to 2010 by 28-69% is well established. Conversely, the same apparent decline in physical abuse could not be confirmed by the authors.

“Our biggest challenge, [having completed all our cases] to date...[is] discussing our future plans for the team. The team is committed to continuing to meet...to continue the communication with all of the agencies and discuss any systems changes that may need to be made. Many of the agencies may transition into the newly organized CCR team.”
-Susan Clark, Lynchburg DVFR Team

What's in the News: Recent State and National Headlines

WHO Suggests Raising Liquor Price to Curb Violence Against Women

The [*World Health Organization*](#), citing studies carried out in Brazil and Australia showing that reducing alcohol service hours is linked to a reduction in homicides, recommended raising the price of alcohol in order to reduce consumption as an intervention to reduce both sexual and physical violence against women.

New IPV Screening Protocol for Health Care Providers Proposed in Maryland

The Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

accepted feedback earlier this month on the introduction of a new screening protocol to help health care providers identify victims of domestic violence. The protocol can be found at www.dhmh.maryland.gov/IPV.

Congress Fails to Reauthorize VAWA

After the Senate passed a version of the Violence Against Women Act that extended protections to three groups of domestic violence victims not covered by the original law (immigrants, same-sex couples, and tribal communities), House Republican leaders countered by passing their own version of the bill which critics said rolled

back existing protections for victims under the Act. No resolution was found before the end of session in December, resulting in the bill dying without a vote. [*Supporters of VAWA*](#) hope to press reauthorization in the 2013 session.

VSU Receives \$300K Grant to Combat Domestic Violence

The U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women has awarded Virginia State University a three year grant to fund programs designed to reduce DV, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking on campus.

Upcoming Conferences and Trainings

Free Webinar on Legal Advocacy: *February 26*
www.VSDVAAlliance.org

[*International Conference on Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence and Stalking*](#)
April 3-5, Baltimore MD

[*13th Annual International Family Justice Center Conference*](#)
April 16-18, Ft Worth TX

[*National DVFR Conference: Global Possibilities*](#)
May 19-21, Phoenix AZ

Update: Virginia DVFR Reporting System

The Virginia Domestic Violence Fatality Review Reporting System is an ambitious undertaking made possible through a collaborative effort by members of the [Virginia Partnership for Community Defined Solutions to Sexual and Domestic Violence](#). With assistance from local and regional DVFR teams, the partnership in the final stages of creating a data collection tool to be used in conjunction with a web-based database to collect data and information gathered through case review by teams across the state.

While the Virginia Family and Intimate Partner Homicide Surveillance Program collects and analyzes information on all family and intimate partner homicides occurring in Virginia, the DV Fatality Review Reporting System will add to the depth of information available about domestic violence homicides. Through the confidential fatality review proc-

ess, unique information such as detailed criminal histories, risk factors, and community service responses will add to our understanding of fatal domestic violence.

Local and regional teams will be able to use the Reporting System to gather, organize, and analyze their case review data to assist them in formulating findings and recommendations, and in generating a variety of data reports to share with their respective communities.

Funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women, the Reporting System is currently in its second draft and in the process of being programmed and revised. The final version of the database and accompanying data collection tools are scheduled to be released statewide on July 1, 2013.

For more information on Virginia DVFR:

Emma Duer, State Coordinator
Virginia Department of Health,
Office of the Chief Medical Examiner
737 North 5th Street, Suite 301
Richmond, VA 23219
(804) 205-3858

Emma.Duer@vdh.virginia.gov

www.vdh.state.va.us/medExam/dvfr



In 1999, the Virginia General Assembly enacted legislation authorizing family and intimate partner fatality review. The [Code of Virginia §32.1-283.3](#) provides for the establishment of local and regional DVFR teams. It provides important statutory confidentiality protection, and directs the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner to provide technical assistance and training.

Community Highlight: Norfolk

The City of Norfolk was recognized in December by the Office of the Attorney General's [Safe in Our Communities: Community Recognition Program for Promising Practices in Domestic Violence Response](#) for its collaborative efforts to prevent domestic violence in their community.

From the Norfolk DVFR team's 2012 report:

"Norfolk's city authorities approved the creation of the Norfolk Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team in 2003. The DVFR team brings together prosecutors, magistrates, judges, nurses, social workers, defense attorneys, detectives, police, sheriff's deputies, community service providers, mental health counselors, child protective service workers and other local domestic violence stakeholders. The team began its fatality reviews

in 2009. While recognizing the statutory requirement to review only closed cases, the Team wanted to ensure that the cases it reviewed occurred recently enough that the solutions to any identified problems would still be relevant. Therefore, the Team decided to begin its review with fatalities that occurred in 2005."

The 2012 report includes findings and recommendations from 18 cases from 2005-2008. During the course of their case review work, the team sent a member to a conference in 2010 to learn about best practices in DVFR. After learning at this conference about the Maryland Lethality Assessment Protocol, members of the DVFR team were key in bringing



danger assessment to the forefront of local law enforcement policies and training. In September, 2012, roughly 700 Norfolk police officers received training on the new mandatory Lethality Assessment Protocol.

Congratulations to the City of Norfolk, and to the Norfolk DVFR team on this award and your great achievements in fatality review and community coordinated response to domestic violence!