The Belgian Ministry of Public Health has shown great interest in the problem of domestic violence by asking a scientific study on the matter to two Belgian associations (Société Scientifique de médecine Générale and Wetenschappelijke Vereniging van Vlaamse Huisartsen) and financing it as soon as in 2002, under supervision of the administration.

A guide divided in three parts - namely conjugal violence, children abuse and elderly abuse - was worked out; it is aimed at making first line medical professionals aware of the problem and the questions that health professionals ask themselves concerning early identification, care and deontological or ethical issues. The guide comprises a literature review, epidemiological data, the different stages of screening and care. A consensual approach was developed around legal, deontological and care attests aspects in cooperation with general practitioners, emergency physicians, non-medical actors, help services and experts.

The guide and the posters were spread in all general hospitals (aimed at emergency services, maternity and geriatric services) as well as in psychiatric hospitals and sheltered housing. Folders and posters were also sent to general practitioners.

In total, 1,300 guides, 1700 folders and 500 posters were distributed.

The results of the study can be found on the website of the Federal Public Service:
http://www.health.fgov.be/

A second study was made in 2005 - it consisted in assessing among health professionals the impact of the different media that were sent (guides, posters, folders). Some parts of the guide were improved. Practical tools, under the shape of summary cards and diagrams like decision trees, were made and spread on the website.

In 2006, public services will organize the development of a test recording of conjugal violence acts in a representative sample of emergency services. The goal is to define the content, the methodology and the feedback concerning that recording in order to generalize it later to all hospitals and to make physicians aware of the need to gather data.

Within the framework of the registration made by the mobile emergency services, a working group is currently studying the issue of suicide patients who are transported to hospital by these mobile emergency services. In addition to the already available registration elements, the aim is to further refine the registration with the help of specialists, in order to get a better picture of the issue in the future.

The National Action Plan against conjugal violence involves the ministers of Public Service, Justice, Home Affairs and Public Health and their public services. The Institute for the equality of Women and Men has been given the task to coordinate and evaluate the plan. The WHO’s World report on violence and health published in 2002 describes various recommendations on the measures to be taken by countries as regards violence. Actions undertaken by the FPS comply with these recommendations. The National Action Plan against conjugal violence 2010-2014 now also concerns other forms of violence such as female genital
mutilation, forced marriage, and honour-related violence. The National Action Plan 2010-2014 has been approved by the Council of Ministers.

A working group about survey of theft, vandalism and aggression in Belgian hospitals made following recommendations:

- make registration in hospitals compulsory using standard anonymous form;
- launch awareness-raising campaigns using posters and prevention campaigns, possibly in conjunction with the government Department of Home Affairs;
- promote these preventive measures through the accreditation standards or funding requirements;
- encourage hospitals to lodge a complaint with the police through cooperation agreements;
- attract nurses’ attention to the problem during training.

It also has been decided inside the Federal Public Service to give priority to the violence issue within sustainable development activities.

VPA focal person

Dr Dimitri Desantoine
Federal Service of Health, Food Chain Security and Environment
Tel.: 32 2 5248684
Fax: 32 2 5248699
e-mail: dimitri.desantoine@health.belgium.be

Dr Desantoine holds a Medical Doctor degree from the Université Libre de Bruxelles in Belgium, as well as a degree in Public Hygiene. He is a medical doctor at the Directorate General Health Care. He is the focal person for violence prevention at the Federal Service of Health and is responsible for coordinating studies about intimate partner violence, child and elder abuse and also activities (e.g. studies, training, registration) related to the prevention of female genital mutilation. He has worked on these topics since the beginning of 2006.