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## Governor's Message

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### Governor Benjamin J. Cayetano September 1996

I am honored by the *Hawaii Medical Journal's* invitation to submit a message to readers of this issue dedicated to the subject of domestic violence—the single greatest cause of injury to women in our society.

This is truly a critical topic that deserves the attention of the medical profession in Hawaii. Physicians, members of our medical community, and others who read this monthly journal are in a unique position to deal with this *silent epidemic* that constitutes a major public health problem throughout our state and nation.

Last year, my first as Governor, I issued a proclamation declaring October to be *Domestic Violence Awareness Month in Hawaii*. In signing that proclamation, I was pleased to join with a number of community advocacy groups in focusing on the seriousness and enormity of the problem of domestic violence in our society. Again this year, I intend to proclaim October as a month in which Hawaii's people will address this social issue that cries out for attention and action.

Doctors play a crucial role in early diagnosis. As a "first line of defense," they have the skills and experience to recognize signs of abuse, along with the resources to refer victims and their families to appropriate agencies for counseling and follow-up.

I commend the journal's publisher, the Hawaii Medical Association, for its decision to devote an entire edition to domestic violence. I thank Hawaii's medical community for its past commitment to curbing violence to women and children, and I encourage all of you to continue your participation in this ongoing prevention campaign.

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## HMA President's Message

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### Carl W. Lehman MD

Violence is one of the most profound, yet preventable health epidemics of our time. Domestic Violence is pervasive. There is no protection in economic status, race or creed. Approximately 2,000,000 women are assaulted by their intimate male partners annually in the United States. Twelve million or 25% of American women will be abused in their lifetime. Twenty-five per cent to nearly half of pregnant women have been physically abused and 22% to 35% of women who present to emergency departments for any reason have been assaulted.

The American Medical Association has recognized this silent epidemic in our society. Dr Robert McAfee, a recent president of the

AMA and a friend of many Hawaii physicians was very influential during his tenure in emphasizing the importance of this silent epidemic. The Alliance of the American Medical Association has worked to promote good health for all Americans. Many state societies have become active in educating the public and physicians about the significance of domestic violence. The national as well as many state alliance organizations have promoted the SAVE Program (to Stop American's Violence Everywhere). The American Medical Association has published excellent pamphlets which are available through the AMA which include Diagnostic and Treatment Guidelines on: (1) child physical abuse and neglect; (2) child sexual abuse; (3) domestic violence; (4) mental health effects on family violence; (5) elderly abuse and neglect and (6) strategies for the treatment and prevention of sexual assault.

The American Medical Association's resident physician section has recognized this silent epidemic and is attempting to educate their colleagues about the problem. Dr Erin Tracy wrote in the *JAMA*, June 12, 1996, Vol. 275, No. 22 in the resident's forum about his experience in questioning 8 consecutive patients who arrived at a clinic with routine gynecological complaints. He asked each of them if they had ever been physically abused and was horrified to learn that all 8 women had been physically assaulted by their intimate partners within the past year. He points out that physicians do not routinely ask patients if they have ever been threatened or harmed. As he noted, when women were asked, they showed no hesitation in talking about their experience, but seemed hesitant to volunteer the information.

Why don't we ask? Is it because we are not prepared to assist the patient who has a problem or are we unprepared to help or refer patients with problems due to domestic violence? Or is it because we have not been trained and feel uneasy in uncovering a problem we cannot handle? These are some of the reasons, although there are many more. Of 143 accredited medical schools in the United States and Canada, only 47% require formal training in domestic violence. The Hawaii Medical Association Committee on Domestic Violence and the Hawaii Medical Association Alliance have been promoting education of physicians as well as the public regarding this problem.

Thanks to all of those members involved in communicating on this subject. If we are to resolve this massive problem of violence, we must teach our children to interact and resolve problems respecting others rights and privileges. We must realize that intimate relations and satisfactory relationships do not occur by one controlling the other, but rather by resolving problems through mutual respect and a willingness to understand each other.

I urge all physicians to include a question regarding physical abuse in initial patient questionnaires or during history taking. When you identify a patient who needs help, please use information in this journal as a source for referral to a crisis agency when you feel you cannot handle the case appropriately.

My thanks goes to Dr Florence Chinn for her hard work and dedication in compiling and organizing the material in this issue of



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the Hawaii Medical Journal. I also wish to thank Dr Chinn and Dr Shay Bintliff for their leadership and accomplishments as co-chairs of the HMA Domestic Violence Committee through the year.