



Patients attack GPs, staff 'nearly every day'

By Natasha Rudra

Doctors and staff at GP surgeries are verbally abused or attacked by patients nearly every day, new research has found.

Up to 64 per cent of doctors have experienced violence or aggression from patients, while reception staff take the brunt of verbal abuse.

In an apparent world-first, the Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute will carry out a national survey of doctors and medical staff to find out the extent of violence in GP surgeries.

Four doctors have been killed by patients in Australia over the past 12 years.

Associate Professor Rhian Parker said there had been little research into the topic and the attacks on GPs were often seen as an aberration.

But new evidence showed doctors, receptionists and practice nurses experienced abuse from patients on a daily basis. Dr Parker said many seemed to be accustomed to the aggression.

"What I was surprised at was the fact that they thought it was a normal part of the job," she said.

"Even GPs who'd been threatened significantly – one with an axe – seemed to shrug it off a bit as part of the job."

Patients often became aggressive because of long wait times to see a doctor or the cost of treatment.

"One of the issues was having access to GPs, having to wait a long time or not getting an appointment," she said.

Women GPs were more likely to experience sexual harassment than men and most aggressive behaviour from patients occurred during surgery hours. More serious violence, such as physical attacks, stalking and sexual harassment, took place after surgery hours.

Results of the study, commissioned by the Department of Health and Ageing, are expected at the end of this year. Medical practice workers can fill out the survey on the ANU website at anu.edu.au/aphcri