

A woman's health care should not be

VIOLENCE against women has been ever present in our society for centuries across all cultures, races and socio-economic groups. In Australia, it was legal for a husband to rape his wife in marriage until the mid-80s when all Australian jurisdictions amended their law.

The Australian Law Reform Commission acknowledges that a common (now known) myth in law was that "women and children are inherently unreliable and lie about sexual assault". Women are constantly mocked for their ability to recall specific details from an argument they had with their spouse from 20-odd years ago but have been, and are still, deemed "unreliable"

Nurse Amanda Duncan has seen many cases of abuse against women in Tasmania's health system. She says such behaviour needs to be called out

in remembering explicit details of sexual assault.

A pivotal problem regarding violence against women that is often overlooked is what is being achieved at an institutional/organisational level to identify, reflect on, challenge and reform archaic patriarchal cultures?

As a registered nurse and midwife, I have witnessed an array of abuse against women, children, men and non-binary

people, with the majority of the perpetrators being men.

I have worked in multiple departments across two Tasmanian hospitals.

The following are examples of the abuse that I have witnessed women subjected to in healthcare, untold stories for far too long.

I have observed women who have made the informed decision to terminate a pregnancy be denied a bed on a ward by senior staff.

Women pay taxes, women have a right to access safe and equitable public health care.

I have seen women treated as "hysterical" and belittled because they presented to hospital with extreme menstrual pain. I hear healthcare workers scoff and say, "Take some Panadol and Nurofen, it's just a period".

For any woman who has adenomyosis, endometriosis or PCOS, a period is not "just" a period. How are women expected to be discharged home feeling empowered following such treatment and judgment?

Women have died because they were dismissed with "premenopausal" vaginal bleeding, when in fact they had

undiagnosed uterine cancer. By the time their symptoms exacerbated, and routine testing/appropriate referrals were undertaken, it was too late for lifesaving treatment.

Women are not being heard and they are dying as a result.

Women have presented to hospital with multiple fractured ribs and heavily beaten faces to have it documented in their notes "alleged domestic violence".

Alleged? When questioned on this, healthcare professionals have stated to me this terminology is used because they cannot prove domestic violence has occurred.

I looked into the eyes of a

woman's disfigured face and shattered soul, then proceeded to delete the word "alleged".

I believe her.

A medical professional denied a woman pain relief when she was experiencing extreme pain.

"She doesn't need pain relief. Look at the colour of her hair - it is purple! She is just a vain hypochondriac!" was their response. "Purple hair - Vain!" was documented on the woman's legal clinical notes.

Women are being denied their fundamental human right to adequate healthcare based on their appearance and the judgment of others.

Prior to an operation a young woman underwent a

influenced by hair colour

routine pregnancy test and was informed she was pregnant. When questioning a doctor on the potential harm the baby may incur during the procedure, one doctor stated, "I wouldn't bother worrying; she will just abort it anyway".

Young women are reporting that they are being advised by doctors (not in the obstetrics and gynaecology specialty) of what contraception they should or shouldn't be using because of their treating doctors' own personal religious beliefs regarding contraception.

Internalised misogynistic ideologies are ever present in our education system, healthcare system, governments, justice system

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and ... well, everywhere.

I think of how Brittany Higgins' report of rape was handled and wonder how do governments, institutions and organisations expect to win the battle of violence against women in their homes, when they are exacerbating the hostile culture against women in society?

Remember, it was the law that once legally accepted women being raped in marriages. It was the

government that once denied women the opportunity to vote. It was healthcare professionals who once refused unmarried women contraception. It was banks that once rejected women from acquiring their own bank accounts.

Governments and institutions once propagated sexual, financial, political and reproductive control over women, thus fostering a culture of violence against women in their home.

We need to persist in reflecting on archaic practices and collectively collaborate to put a stop to dehumanising women.

Regardless of one's age, race, gender or profession, if

you hear or see something that makes you feel uncomfortable, there is a reason for feeling that way.

Speak up.

Call people out on misogynistic behaviour.

Report it. Strive to re-educate people. Whatever you do, do not remain complicit.

We all have a responsibility in extinguishing violence against all people.

For anyone accessing healthcare, please refer the Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights to inform yourself of your healthcare rights.

Launceston's Amanda Duncan is a registered nurse and midwife.