

FIREARMS VIOLENCE AND PREVENTION COMMITTEE REPORT

At the July Board meeting of the Board of Trustees of the California Medical Association, a white paper on firearm violence prevention was submitted and approved. Physicians have expressed interest in this area for many years – there are resolutions that go back decades that shape CMA policy - but it was felt that this policy had been developed in a piecemeal manner and that a comprehensive statement was needed.

San Mateo County physicians have also been active on this issue in the past couple years. In April of 2016 the bioethics committee had a special meeting with the general membership where Stanford law professor, Attorney John J. Donahue, III, spoke about firearm violence. The flyer for the meeting stated that firearm violence was the third leading cause of preventable death in the United States, with more than 30,000 deaths annually (roughly two-thirds of which are suicides) and approximately 75,000 non-fatal injuries. The San Mateo Medical Association Council worked in the fall of 2016 on a resolution to address the issue.

The CMA paper declares that the United States has struggled with an epidemic of firearm violence. While acknowledging that firearms violence is primarily a human and civil rights matter, it expresses that it is also a public health and public safety matter. Physicians have a role in routine screening and assessment that allows them to educate and counsel patients about the leading causes of morbidity and mortality and this makes them uniquely situated to assess risk, provide education and change behaviors related to gun violence. The paper strongly supports physician's rights to discuss firearm safety issues with their patients, and is supportive of expanded education and training of physicians of the benefits and risks of firearm ownership, safety practices, and how to communicate with patients about firearm violence.

Some other specific areas covered in the paper is the need to decrease the disproportionately high rates of firearm violence in low- income communities and in communities of color, and the need to decrease the frequency of depiction of violence in the media. It also opposes the suppression of firearm research that is needed for the advancement of evidence-based policies. It addresses the problematic nature of the focus on people with mental illness as perpetrators of violence, as mental illness is more strongly related to suicide than violence against others, and people with mental illness are more likely to be victims than perpetrators of violence. While acknowledging that gun ownership is valued by many people, the paper suggests that there should be strong legal and regulatory protections in place including universal background checks and safety courses, requirements to report loss of a firearm within 72 hours, and restrictions on firearms designed to have rapid killing capacity, as well as recommending firearm safety practices such as storing firearms unloaded and in locked positions in a separate location from ammunition. The report also calls for targeted public education campaigns and a public health approach directed towards firearm

violence. The full content of the four-page statement and background material can be found at >>>>>>>>.

This article is envisioned as part of a series of articles I hope to submit on an ongoing basis of matters of interest that come before the CMA Board of Trustees at their quarterly meetings. If you have questions about CMA actions, or ideas for directions that CMA should be heading, please feel free to contact me at any time.

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