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Firearm-related injury continues to significantly impact Canada's health care system

The Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians (CAEP) released an updated position statement on gun control. Firearms are an important cause of injury and death in Canada. Contrary to commonly held misperceptions, gun related injury is most often associated with suicides as opposed to criminal intent, is more often associated with rifles and shotguns and is over represented in rural and aboriginal populations. More effective gun control must continue to focus on long arms, rural populations and those at risk of suicide or domestic violence.

"As an emergency physician I have witnessed too many tragedies of patients injured or killed by firearms. All of these were preventable. As advocates for our patients, we must oppose the weakening of gun control laws. Gun control protects citizens and saves lives", commented Dr. Carolyn Snider, CAEP member and lead author of the position statement.

The following measures are recommended:

1. Continued support for the original provisions of Bill C-68 and the gun control law, and active opposition to any attempt at repealing the national firearms registry (including the long gun registry).
2. Advocacy for the implementation by the government of a nationwide surveillance system for firearm-related injury and mortality.
3. Expansion of programs focused on the prevention of suicide, intimate partner violence and gang-related violence.
4. Support for legislation mandating that health care facilities report gun shot wounds, but not knife injuries or other violent injuries.
5. Continued support for research into firearm-related injury and death in order to guide further public policy development and future legislation.

"CAEP's research credits Canada's strict licensing and registration regime with the significant decline in firearm injury and death we have seen in recent years: 400 fewer Canadians are killed with guns annually in Canada than before the law was introduced. We are delighted that they are as committed as they were 16 years ago to supporting strict controls over all firearms. The current government has made no secret of its plans to dismantle gun control and we will need CAEP and other health and safety experts to stand firm", said Wendy Cukier, Professor, Ryerson University and President, Coalition for Gun Control.

In 2004, 743 Canadians were killed by the use of firearms and, despite general media focus on urban crime, 76% of these firearm-related deaths were caused by suicide. In 2005, Ontario passed Bill 110, the first Canadian law that required health care facilities to report to legal authorities the name of anyone presented with a gun shot wound. In March 2007, Saskatchewan passed similar legislation, as did Nova Scotia in November of the same year.

The Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians (CAEP) is a national advocacy and professional development organization representing 1,750 of Canada's emergency physicians. CAEP's mission is to provide leadership in emergency health care with a goal to enhance the health and safety of all Canadians.

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