Statement of the ACP: Reducing Firearms-Related Deaths and Injuries

Statement attributable to: David L. Bronson, MD, FACP, President, American College of Physicians

December 20, 2012

The incalculably sad and tragic murders of children, teachers, and staff at an elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut reminds us all that we are not doing enough as a country to prevent deaths and injuries from firearms.

President Barack Obama, in his remarks on Sunday at the Sandy Hook Interfaith Prayer Vigil, noted that “This is our first task — caring for our children. It’s our first job. If we don’t get that right, we don’t get anything right. That’s how, as a society, we will be judged. And by that measure, can we truly say, as a nation, that we are meeting our obligations?” The answer, he continued, is “We’re not doing enough. And we will have to change.”

The American College of Physicians, representing 133,000 internal medicine physician specialists and medical student members, is committed to being part of that change. Since 1996, ACP has proposed policies to reduce deaths and injuries related to firearms, even as we must also acknowledge today that we are not doing enough. Over the next weeks and months, ACP will review the research on the most effective approaches to reduce firearms-related injuries and deaths, and then from this review, offer our ideas for a multi-faceted, comprehensive approach.

But we know already that there are policies that can help and should be acted upon immediately. Congress should start by banning the sale of assault-type weapons and high capacity (ammunition) magazines that are designed to kill as many people as possible in the shortest possible time. Weapons like the semi-automatic rifle used to kill 26 children and adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

The public health system must be strengthened and adequately funded to provide access to treatment, as long as it is needed, to people with mental health and substance abuse problems. It is especially urgent that the system provide affordable and effective treatment options for persons who may be at greater risk of inflicting violence on themselves and others, even as we recognize that most persons with mental health and substance abuse problems pose no danger.
Government must not impose any restrictions on physicians being able to counsel their patients on reducing injuries and deaths from firearms in the home, as some state legislatures have attempted to do.

Much more, though, needs to be done, not only to prevent massacres like Sandy Hook, and Tucson, and Virginia Tech, and Aurora, and Columbine, but also to reduce the deaths and injuries that kill more than 10,000 people each year-- in their homes, neighborhoods, and workplaces.

President Obama observed that “No single law — no set of laws can eliminate evil from the world, or prevent every senseless act of violence in our society. But that can’t be an excuse for inaction. Surely, we can do better than this. If there is even one step we can take to save another child, or another parent, or another town, from the grief that has visited Tucson, and Aurora, and Oak Creek, and Newtown, and communities from Columbine to Blacksburg before that — then surely we have an obligation to try.”

The American College of Physicians concurs, and today we pledge to do our part to try to end the recurring tragedy of deaths and injuries from persons using firearms and all forms of violence.

***

http://www.acponline.org/pressroom/reduce_firearms_deaths.htm