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The organizations representing America’s primary care physicians today spoke out against proposed laws that could infringe on the patient-physician relationship.

The American Academy of Family Physicians, the American College of Physicians and the American Osteopathic Association oppose legislation that places limits on the content of information exchanged within the patient-physician relationship because of the potential harm it can cause to the patient’s and family’s health.

These organizations — that provide primary care services — represent more than 300,000 of the nation’s physicians, who must be free to have open and honest communication with patients about all aspects of health and safety.

“The AAFP believes that patient confidentiality must be protected,” said AAFP President Roland Goertz, MD, MBA. “Any proposal that seeks to intrude on these rights and place restrictions on what can be discussed jeopardizes a patient’s health and represents unwise governmental intrusion.”

A confidential relationship between patient and physician is essential for the free flow of information necessary for sound medical care. Only in a setting of trust can a patient share the private feelings and personal history that enable the physician to comprehend fully, to diagnose logically and to treat properly. If they are to provide proper care, physicians should be able to gather any information that can have an impact on the health of their patients and families.
“The American Osteopathic Association opposes any and all efforts to censor communication that occurs between patients and their physicians,” said AOA President Karen J. Nichols, DO. “Any legislation that impedes on this relationship jeopardizes the health and safety not only of our patients, but also their families.”

Safety and injury prevention are crucial components of preventive medical care. Primary care physicians can help improve the health of the American public by providing accurate and meaningful patient education. The AAFP, ACP and AOA have long standing policies on the need to provide patient education, particularly when guns are present in the home.

Proposed legislation in Florida and a number of other states could limit physicians from asking their patients about firearm ownership and prevent the discussion of their safe storage and handling.

Firearms education of both adults and children has been shown to decrease the likelihood of unintentional injury or death. The presence of firearms in the home, when improperly stored, can present a health danger to patients and others.

“On this particular issue, ACP’s policy encourages physicians ‘to inform patients about the dangers of keeping firearms, particularly handguns, in the home and to advise them on ways to reduce the risk of injury,’” said ACP President Virginia L. Hood, MBBS, MPH, FACP. “However, this issue is much bigger than guns, it is about whether the government or any other body should be allowed to tell physicians what they can and can’t discuss with their patients.”

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**About the American Academy of Family Physicians**

*Founded in 1947, the AAFP represents 100,300 physicians and medical students nationwide. It is the only medical society devoted solely to primary care. Approximately one in four of all office visits are made to family physicians. Family medicine’s cornerstone is an ongoing, personal patient-physician relationship focused on integrated care. To learn more about the specialty of family medicine, the AAFP’s positions on issues and clinical care, and for downloadable multi-media highlighting family medicine, visit [www.aafp.org/media](http://www.aafp.org/media).*

**American College of Physicians**

*The American College of Physicians ([www.acponline.org](http://www.acponline.org)) is the largest medical specialty organization and the second-largest physician group in the United States. ACP members include 130,000 internal medicine physicians (internists), related subspecialists, and medical students. Internists specialize in the prevention, detection, and treatment of illness in adults. Follow ACP on Twitter ([www.twitter.com/acpinternists](http://www.twitter.com/acpinternists)) and Facebook ([www.facebook.com/acpinternists](http://www.facebook.com/acpinternists)).*

**About the American Osteopathic Association**

*The American Osteopathic Association (AOA) proudly represents its professional family of more than 70,000 osteopathic physicians (DOs); promotes public health; encourages scientific research; serves as the primary certifying body for DOs; is the accrediting agency for osteopathic medical schools; and has federal authority to accredit hospitals and other health care facilities. More information on DOs/osteopathic medicine can be found at [www.osteopathic.org](http://www.osteopathic.org).*