

## Preventing Firearm Related Deaths and Injuries in the United States of America

### Position Statement of the Sacramento Chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR/Sacramento)

Adopted January 28, 2015

Firearm-related deaths and injuries are a serious public health problem in the United States. The rate of firearm-related deaths is many times higher in the United States than in other democratic, high income nations. While the roots of firearm violence are complex, among the factors which most clearly distinguish the United States from other countries with much lower rates of firearm related deaths and injuries are the weak gun control laws in the United States and the widespread availability of firearms. Handguns account for the majority of all firearm related deaths and injuries. Although most people who keep handguns in their homes cite personal protection as the reason for having them, there is overwhelming evidence that guns in the home are much more likely to be used to kill, injure, or intimidate a household member than to protect against an intruder. Semiautomatic firearms that are designed to rapidly kill or maim large numbers of enemy combatants have been used in a rash of recent mass shootings, including the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre in December, 2012. It is the position of PSR/Sacramento that there is no legitimate civilian use for such weapons.

The Second Amendment to the United States Constitution states, “A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.” Prior to 2008, it had been repeatedly established in Supreme Court decisions, in decisions of lower courts, and in reviews by legal scholars that the Second Amendment was intended to protect a collective right of the people to maintain armed state militias, such as the current day National Guard, not a right of individual citizens to own firearms. PSR/Sacramento regrets that a narrow one justice majority of the current Supreme Court reversed decades of legal precedent in ruling in 2008 and again in 2010 that the Second Amendment confers an individual right to own handguns. PSR/Sacramento believes that the self-evident right of the people of the United States to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness includes the right to be free from the threat of wanton gun violence

It is PSR/Sacramento’s position that the rates of firearm related deaths and injuries in the United States can and should be reduced to levels at or below the rates in other democratic, high income countries that still allow responsible hunters and target shooters to practice their sports, but that have rates of firearm-related deaths that are a tenth or less of the rates in the United States. In order to accomplish this goal, it is PSR/Sacramento’s position that the U.S. must adopt firearm regulations similar to the laws in those other countries. PSR/Sacramento agrees with taking short-term, incremental steps toward reducing rates of firearm related deaths and injuries that have been proposed by other organizations, including banning assault weapons and high capacity magazines, expanding criteria for persons prohibited from owning firearms, closing loopholes for background checks, restoring federal funding for scientific study of preventing firearm

related deaths and injuries, and rescinding special protection from products liability for the firearm industry. It is PSR/Sacramento's position, though, that the single most important step that needs to be taken in order to substantially reduce rates of firearm-related deaths and injuries in the United States is to ban the civilian ownership of handguns, and that in order to enact such legislation, the recent radical re-interpretation of the Second Amendment by five justices of the Supreme Court needs to be reversed. PSR/Sacramento encourages its members and other health care professionals to counsel patients regarding the dangers of guns in their homes and in our communities and to continue to work to address the root causes of violence in our society.