

May 14, 2019

Bill Casey, M.P.
Chair, Standing Committee on Health
House of Commons

Re: Standing Committee on Health's study on violence faced by healthcare workers

Dear Mr. Casey:

I am writing on behalf of the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) to submit recommendations for consideration by the Standing Committee on Health (the Committee) as part of the study on violence faced by healthcare workers.

The CMA is deeply concerned with the state of workplace safety in all health care settings, including hospitals, long-term care, and home care settings. As in all experiences of violence, it is unacceptable for healthcare workers to be victims of violence in the provision of care to patients. While there is limited data nationally to understand the incidence of violence against healthcare workers, anecdotal evidence suggests that these experiences are increasing in frequency and severity.

A 2010 survey of members of the College of Family Physicians of Canada shockingly found that, in the previous month, nearly one-third of respondents had been exposed to some form of aggressive behaviour from a patient (90%) or patient's family (70%). The study concluded that "Canadian family physicians in active practice are subjected to regular abuse from their patients or family members of their patients."¹

These concerns were brought to the CMA's General Council in 2015, where our members passed a resolution calling for:

"the federal government to amend the Criminal Code by making it a specific criminal offence to assault health care providers performing their duties."

The CMA is prioritizing initiatives that support physician health and wellness. Increasingly, there is a recognition of the role of the workplace, primarily health care settings, and safe working conditions as having an important influence of physician health and wellness.

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¹ Miedema BB, Hamilton R, Tatemichi S et al. Monthly incidence rates of abusive encounters for Canadian family physicians by patients and their families. *Int J Family Med.* 2010; 2010: 387202. Available: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3275928/pdf/IJFM2010-387202.pdf> (accessed 2019 May 9).

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Addressing violence against providers in healthcare settings will require action from both federal and provincial/territorial governments. In light of the above, the CMA respectfully submits the following recommendations for consideration by the Committee in its study on violence against healthcare workers:

- 1) The CMA recommends that the Committee on Health support the call to amend the Criminal Code of Canada to introduce a new criminal offence for assault against a healthcare provider performing their duty.
- 2) The CMA recommends that the Committee on Health support establishing monitoring of violence against healthcare workers, that is consistent across jurisdictions, and have an active role in responding appropriately to trends.
- 3) The CMA recommends that the Committee on Health support federal leadership in a pan-Canadian approach to support workplace safety in healthcare settings, including collaborating with the provinces and territories to improve violence prevention.

Finally, the CMA welcomes and supports the petition recently tabled in the House of Commons by Dr. Doug Eyolfson, calling for the Minister of Health "to develop a pan-Canadian prevention strategy to address growing incidents of violence against health care workers."

In closing, the CMA is encouraged that the Committee is undertaking this study. I look forward to the Committee's report on this topic and the opportunity to collaborate on federal and provincial/territorial action in this matter.

Sincerely,



F. Gigi Osler, BScMed, MD, FRCSC
President

c.c.: Marilyn Gladu, M.P., Vice Chair, Standing Committee on Health
Don Davies, M.P., Vice Chair Standing Committee on Health