Court Rejection of Physician Gag Law on Guns in 200 Words

Population Health Sciences

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Last week, a federal court struck down a Florida law prohibiting health care providers from asking patients and families about their use and possession of firearms. Although other states considered similar bills, Florida was the only one to pass anything like it.

This court decision has major implications for children's health and safety. In 2014, 2,550 children died and over 13,500 others were injured by gunshot. Accidental shootings are more likely if there is a firearm in the home, and most unintentional shootings of children happen when a child finds and plays with a loaded gun.

To protect children, pediatricians must be able to discuss all health-related risk factors with families, even social determinants. We know that physician counseling can increase the likelihood of safe storage, and that safe storage reduces both unintentional injury and suicide in children and teenagers.

Pediatricians typically counsel parents on issues like food insecurity, smoking cessation and traffic safety in order to promote a safe and healthy environment for their patients. This court ruling ensures that doctors can do the same on the important issue of gun safety.

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This post is part of our "____ in 200 Words" series. In this series, we tackle issues related to children's health policy and explain and connect you to resources to help understand them further, all in 200 words. If you have any suggestions for a topic in this series, please send a note to PolicyLab's Communications Manager Lauren Walens.