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Transcript: AMA Chair of their Ethics and Medico-Legal Committee, Dr Chris Moy, ABC Radio Adelaide, Mornings

Subject: Firearms and gun control

DAVID BEVAN: Dr Chris Moy is with the AMA. He's the Chair of their Ethics and Medico-Legal Committee. Good morning, Chris.

CHRIS MOY: Good morning.

DAVID BEVAN: What do you think of this debate?

CHRIS MOY: I mean, we look at the end result; it's the harm, and look, the bottom line is I do understand that there is this debate about rights versus harm. But people may view us as the individuals to maybe have a bleeding heart, but we actually are the ones that see the bleeding. And we do know, at the moment, that despite the fact that there has been significant reduction since the National Firearms Agreement, we still have in the order of somewhere between 200 to 300 people die every year of firearm situations. And that's still four to five Christchurch situations; it's just spread evenly over the year. But I mean this is still occurring.

The thing to keep in mind is, I do understand what was said before, that fit and proper people are the ones that should own them. But the problem is that a lot of this debate is that you may be well at the time. But in a lifetime, an individual has about a 1 in 6 or 7 chance of having a major depressive episode; 1 in 25 per cent chance of having a major anxiety episode. And we know that most deaths occur due to suicide within the families of those individuals [indistinct]. So the people at greatest risk are yourself and those people around you. And you might be fine now, but when that comes [indistinct] the availability of the gun is the issue. And for us, the harm is the problem.

DAVID BEVAN: Chris, we'll come back to you in just a moment. We'll try and get a better phone line because we want to hear everything you've got to say. That's Dr Chris Moy from the AMA.

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DAVID BEVAN: Let's go back to Dr Chris Moy from the AMA. Chris, Samantha Lee from Gun Control Australia says it's time to revisit the laws; the technology has changed, there has been change in the State rules. Now, David Handyside from Sporting Shooters says it's minor. But Samantha Lee says it's time, 23 years after Port Arthur and just after the Christchurch shootings, to revisit our gun control laws. What should we do in the opinion of the AMA?

CHRIS MOY: Again, we look at this from the position of harm and we believe in tighter laws with a harmonisation of legislation across Australia and a national real time firearm register.

DAVID BEVAN: So how would you tighten it up?

CHRIS MOY: Well, really, just the harmonisation of laws across Australia so that they are equal in type because, generally, what actually happens with most legislation, when you've got a lobby trying to break down something, they'll tend to work on one State at a time. That's what tends to happen, and I can't tell you the specifics, but I think it's been indicated that's what

normally happens. And then there's sort of a variation across boundaries. And it doesn't make sense that there is. It doesn't make sense that there's not a national firearms register that can be monitored across the country, for example, because, I mean, people cross borders and that's the concern.

And again, as I said before, I think the issue is harm for us. I mean, there's this technical debate about legislation and the weapons themselves. But for us, the issue is we see the end result. It's fine for people to have this debate when they're fine, but people are not fine all the time. They will develop mental illness, there's a very high rate of that, and anxiety. And when that happens, you're suddenly putting- if you've got a gun in the house, suddenly you and all those around you are at a far greater risk because they're the ones most likely to die.

DAVID BEVAN: Do we require somebody who has a gun licence to see a GP or a mental health officer, say every few years? I mean if you have a driver's licence and you get to a certain age, you've got to go back and see a doctor to see whether you can safely drive a car. Your point is that, over a lifetime, somebody- a certain percentage of the population are going to have mental health issues, and if they've got a gun, that's a chemistry for a disaster. Do we require gun owners to have a mental health check every few years?

CHRIS MOY: No, and –

DAVID BEVAN: Should we?

CHRIS MOY: I think that would sound like a reasonable idea to have some sort of a medical, though that's not been a specific position about it. At the moment, it's a bit reactive. If we; for example, if I'm aware that somebody is at risk, then there's a need for me to report that individual, which actually has serious consequences for them at that point. But at the moment, it's a bit reactive. And the problem with that situation is that individuals who have depression, for example, may not want to see their doctor at that point, and that's the problem.

So I mean, for us, it's the harm. And look, again, this debate's fine when you're fine and you've got no mental illness and it's all life's hunky-dory, that's fine. But the problem is in a lifetime, lives are not- you know, you go through bad patches and then suddenly, if there's a gun in the house, yourself and those around you are the ones at risk if there's a gun in the house. And that's the problem.

DAVID BEVAN: Okay. Well, Dr Chris Moy, thank you for your time. Chair of the Ethics and Medico-Legal Committee with the AMA, the Australian Medical Association.

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