injury
P R E V E N T I O N

Journal of the International Society for Child and Adolescent Injury Prevention

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Editorial

Random thoughts

This issue includes two guest editorials from members of the editorial board, and a third by David Grossman, an expert on suicide prevention. I asked him to contribute because of the review paper on adolescent suicides (p126), and the original article by Li *et al* (p115). With these welcome additions to this section of the journal, there is little space left for me to climb on my soapbox and preach at our readers. There are, however, a few random thoughts I would like to share with you.

The first is a comment on the decision to include the press release of President Clinton's announcement about child safety in this issue. Although much of what he says will not be new for most readers of *Injury Prevention*, what is new and of immense importance is for a head of state to deliver such a message. It is, so far as I am aware, unprecedented for any such person to have made a radio address to the nation on a topic related exclusively to child safety. Even if it does not elicit the coverage I hope it will, its symbolic value is beyond measure. It seems certain to better situate injury prevention on the political agenda of the United States. I would consider it little short of a miracle if the Prime Minister of Canada were to issue a similar statement, but such an event may now be slightly less miraculous.

What we must realize, however, is that few heads of state are likely to decide to make statements about child safety without some prompting or pressure. In this case I have no idea who was working behind the scenes to bring this about, but whoever it was, whether a group or an individual, deserves great credit. I urge he, she, or them to write something for this journal describing how and what they did so that we can all learn from this example.

We must also realize that what we are struggling to overcome in the battle for more action on child safety is not simply inertia or ignorance. There are also situations— perhaps far more than we suspect—when there is outright opposition to the goals we seek to achieve. In some cases, the opposition comes from colleagues whose values or interpretation of the data differ from ours. This was evident in the spate of letters to the editor of the *BMJ* (1997; **314**: 69–70) criticizing the call made by Ron Davis, editor of *Tobacco Control*, and me, for bicycle helmet laws.[1]

In other cases, as Roberts and DiGuiseppi note in an editorial in another issue of the *BMJ*, the opposition often arises for financial reasons. They state that 'Despite well documented safety benefits, the introduction of airbags was vigorously opposed by Chrysler chairman Lee Iacocca, Henry Ford II, Richard Nixon, and Ronald Reagan. They feared increased production costs would reduce profits and competitiveness'.[2] When profits are at stake those of us who wish to promote injury prevention would be naive and foolish to assume that goodwill and concern for the lives of children will dominate. Instead, we must be prepared to do battle. What better way to fight than to have a powerful ally on your side such as the President or Prime Minister?

We must also realize that even Presidents. are not free to act alone and reading between the lines of Mr Clinton's statement it appears that the proposal for a 'universal system for attaching car safety seats' (the American equivalent of ISOFIX) will require approval and this will only happen after the idea has gone out 'for public comment'. Child safety advocates must stand prepared to help the President, and thus set an important example for other countries, if the industry criticizes this measure because it, too, may reduce profits and competitiveness.

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Editor

1 Davis RM, Pless IB. Evidence shows that cyclists should wear helmets. *BMJ* 1996; **313**: 629.
2 Roberts I, DiGuiseppi C. Children in cars: child restraints should be built in safety features, not optional extras. *BMJ* 1997; **314**: 392.