



CASW Safety Advice Article #2

Headline: Be the Difference As A Medical Professional

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Word Count: 631

Not only do farmers face the potential for injury on the farm, they are also at risk for illness. Farmers face illnesses related to livestock, grain and chemicals and this exposure doesn't stop at the end of the workday – farmers also live in their workplace. It's this exposure to the workplace 24 hours a day, seven days a week that can create specific health and safety concerns for farmers and their families. Medical professionals like doctors, nurse practitioners and mental health workers have a significant role to play in the health and safety of Canada's farmers. These professionals are uniquely positioned to be farm health and safety champions.

Access to health care in rural areas can be limited. Oftentimes farmers and their families have to travel a great distance to access even primary care. In many rural areas there is a chronic shortage of health care providers. These are a few of the barriers that farmers and their families face when addressing health concerns. So what can health care professionals do to be farm health and safety champions?

First of all, it's important to remember that injury prevention is the most important part of farm safety. That means that illness prevention is the most important part of keeping farmers and farm families healthy. Effective health care of farmers and their families includes a focus on personal health, wellbeing and illness prevention as well as treating illnesses and symptoms. Medical professionals are often perceived as authority figures with great knowledge. Information about health and safety means a great deal when coming from someone who is trusted and knowledgeable.

Understanding the unique health and safety issues of farm life is another means of keeping farm families healthy and safe. Farmers work with and around a variety of hazards. Livestock can cause illnesses like salmonella and influenza; over-exposure to crop protection products can result in health issues ranging from cholinesterase suppression to headaches and diarrhea; grain handling can expose farmers to Hantavirus and respiratory impairments. Physical hazards are just one piece of the many health and safety concerns that farm families can have. Other health and safety concerns can include risk-taking behaviours, mental-health issues, physical activity and the management of chronic diseases. Asking about these hazards and concerns at appointments can lead to discussion of prevention and management tactics or to a quicker and more accurate diagnosis of symptoms.



Speaking the same language as farmers and their families is also an important part of being a farm safety and health champion. For example, understanding what an auger or silo or chaff are can create a connection and provide an appreciation of the day-to-day lives of farm families. This also can give health care professionals an insight into the variety of hazards faced by farmers and their families.

Lastly, advocating for the health and safety of farm families within the health care field is one of the best ways health care professionals can be farm safety champions. Farm safety and health champions help keep those who grow our food healthy and safe and this, in turn, keeps our society healthy and food-secure.

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Canadian Agricultural Safety Week is March 15-21, 2015. For more information about how you can “Be the Difference”, please visit agsafetyweek.ca.

