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Terrorist acts against abortion providers are common in the US. Police survey damage to a women's health clinic in Birmingham, Alabama, following a bomb blast last January. The yellow sheet covers an off-duty police officer who was killed in the blast; a nurse was critically injured.

of the best tools for breaking into closed, tightly knit groups. In this case, police suspect that the sniper is a member of a group that advocates violence as a way of

stopping abortions. The 3 municipal and provincial governments where the shootings occurred, as well as various associations and groups, have been asked to contribute reward money.

At the same time, the investigation continues. Detective Ron Oliver of the Winnipeg Police Service, part of a 4-member team investigating the Fainman shooting, says the task force is working well, with investigators in the 3 centres in constant touch. "It's a priority," he says.

Same person or group?

Bowen believes that some Canadian groups that oppose abortion have joined forces with American counterparts that have already employed violence south of the border. He remains surprised that no one has claimed responsibility for the shootings. "It's unusual," he says.

"We believe, based on our evidence, that they were by the same person or group," adds McCaskill.

Bowen says there is reason to believe the shootings are connected because similar methods were used: all 3 physicians were shot through a window in their home around Remembrance Day — which has historically been a focus of activity across Canada by those who oppose abortion. All the doctors who were shot had performed therapeutic abortions.

"I don't know where they will strike next," Bowen says. "But those involved in providing abortions have reason to be concerned because we haven't arrested the person who committed these 3 horrible acts."

"People should be aware and take precautions," concurs Oliver (see sidebar). The task force asked police forces across the country to contact doctors at risk and inform them about personal protection. "We will take every step possible to stop another attack," says Oliver. ?

Shootings a personal issue for Winnipeg physician

Dr. Ian White, past president of the Manitoba Medical Association, has more of a stake in solving the shootings of 3 Canadian physicians than most doctors. Last Nov. 11 he witnessed the results of one of those attacks personally when he administered anesthesia to his neighbour, Dr. Jack Fainman, after he was shot in the shoulder by a shooter who is still at large. For White, the incident has personalized the issue. "This is not a question of abortionists or nonabortionists. This is a question of violence against physicians. Jack Fainman was a baby doc. He delivered babies his whole career, and now he can't work."

White says physicians need education and height-

ened awareness of the potential risks they face from criminals (CMAJ 1998;159:987-9). Dr. Joe Noone, chair of Canada's first and only physician-sponsored Committee on Violence and a leader in providing workshops on security issues, characterizes the attacks as predatory, or instrumental, violence. "These people will do whatever it takes to achieve their ends: bombings, shootings, anything is appropriate," says the BC forensic psychiatrist. "This is cold, calculated and premeditated — it's part of their job." In the case of the November shootings, Noone says the doctors are a "symbol of what [the perpetrators] are against. To them it's a holy war."