The Gun Talk
How to have effective conversations with patients and families about firearms

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Disclosures

• No payments or gifts from pharma, industry, or other ACCME-defined commercial interests since 2007

• Part of my time is funded by US DHS Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships

• I receive payments from government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and non-healthcare businesses for consultation, training, and expert witness work. In the past, this has included firearm dealers.

• I neither donate to nor receive payments or gifts from pro or anti firearm “advocacy” organizations but I am actively involved in AFFIRM which promotes objective research on firearm injury prevention.
My father is a gun-safe guy.
Key points

• Safer storage reduces the risk of firearm suicide and accidental shootings / negligent discharges
• Limited options for involuntary removal → we need to focus on collaborative interventions
• Cross cultural problem with a motivational interviewing solution
Good people with guns get depressed, too.
**>>393,000,000 civilian-owned firearms in USA (Karp/SAS, 2018)**

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Impact of firearm violence

103k + 140w, 61 incidents  
666k + 2787w, 690 incidents  
537  
549  
20,958  
26,328  
130,000***

2021 Mass shooting deaths + injuries (FBI/ALERRT)
2021 Mass shooting deaths + injuries (GVA)
2021 Police shooting deaths (CDC)
2021 Accidental shooting deaths (CDC)
2021 Firearm homicides (CDC)
2021 Firearm suicides (CDC)
2017 Nonfatal Firearm Injuries (CDC)
Know your target and what’s behind it before pulling the trigger.

Suicide? Homicide? Accidental? Mass shooting?
Idaho Firearm Injuries & Deaths

• 2010-2019: Below average gun deaths compared to other states but above average suicide rate
• $2B/year in costs for gun violence
• 87% of gun deaths are suicides and 60% of suicide deaths are due to firearms
• 75% of IPV femicides used a gun
• Crime guns – mostly from Idaho, average TTC 6 years
Second Amendment, 1791

A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed

- DC v Heller, 2008 (It’s an individual right)
- McDonald v Chicago, 2010 (States follow federal std)
- NYSRPA v Bruen, 2022 (“Historical context” test for 2A)
Idaho Laws

- No permit to purchase or carry (open or concealed)
- No Extreme Risk Protection Order
- No safe storage requirements
- Required reporting of disqualifying MH information
- Everytown “#48 in the country for gun law strength”
The Science of Firearm Injury Prevention
Gun Policy in AMERICA
Suicide
(Science of Gun Policy, 2020 Update)

• **May decrease**: Child Access Prevention Laws, Licensing/P2P, Minimum Age Requirements, Waiting Periods

• **Inconclusive**: BGC, Low-Quality Handguns, Concealed-Carry Laws, Extreme Risk Protection Orders, Prohibitions Associated with Domestic Violence, Prohibitions Associated with Mental Illness, Stand-Your-Ground Laws

• **NSMC**: Bans on ASW/HCM sales, Training Requirements, Firearm Sales Reporting/Recording/Registration Requirements, Gun-Free Zones, Laws Allowing Armed Staff in K–12 Schools, Lost or Stolen Firearm Reporting Requirements, Surrender of Firearms by Prohibited Possessors
Polydisasters, Syndemics, and the 2020 effect
WE BUY GUNS
Single Gun or Entire Collection

KNIVES · COLLECTIBLES
More nurses becoming first-time gun buyers says St. Louis firearm safety instructor

"And we've seen a lot of first-time (gun owners) and people who have no experience with a firearm."

BRIAN KELLY
MAY 26, 2020 - 12:25 PM
Who gets killed by a firearm in the home (Butler et al JAMA IM 2020)

- Updating Kellerman and Reay’s (NEJM) classic 1986 study
- King County, Washington: 2011-2018
- For every lethal defensive gun use:
  - 1.5 accidental/undetermined death
  - 7.9 criminal homicides (mostly friends and family)
  - 48 suicides
New handguns in the home increase suicide risk (Studdert et al NEJM 2020)

- 100x increased suicide risk in first month of ownership
- Male handgun owners 3.4x as likely to kill themselves if they own a handgun because they have a 7.8x increased risk of firearm suicide
- Female handgun owners 7.1x as likely to kill themselves if they own a handgun because they have a 35x increased risk of firearm suicide

“Handgun owners did not have higher rates of suicide by other methods or higher all cause mortality.”

- 48% of the suicides were within one year of purchase
The U.S. Murder Rate, 1960 to 2020

Murders per 100,000 people.

Source: F.B.I.; 2020 estimate, NYT • By The New York Times
6,542 firearms discovered in carry-on bags

Airports with firearm discoveries: 262

Number of Firearm Discoveries Over the Years:
- 2010: 1,123
- 2011: 1,328
- 2012: 1,819
- 2013: 2,272
- 2014: 2,683
- 2015: 3,391
- 2016: 3,957
- 2017: 4,244
- 2018: 4,432
- 2019: 5,977
- 2020: 6,351
- 2021: 6,542

Top 10 Airports for Firearm Discoveries:
- PHX
- DEN
- MCO
- IAH
- ATL
- TPA
- BNA
- AUS
- IAH
- FLL

88% loaded
What We Can Do
Guns are easy to get and difficult to remove.
“You’re not a gun owner, are you?”
The limitations of “counseling as usual”

• 73% of parents of high risk teens with guns do not keep guns out of the home; 16% of parents without guns acquired them (Brent et al 2001)

• Up to 1/3 of young boys pull trigger when left unsupervised near firearms despite safety training / parental belief (Jackman 2001)

• 22% of kids have handled guns in the home without parents’ knowledge (Baxley 2006)

• Approximately 1/3 adults who voluntarily relinquished firearms after voluntary admission re-acquire within 2 years (Sherman 2001)

• Only 6% of MISA Patients recall being asked about firearms in the past year (Carney 2002)
Most gun owners want them for self defense

- Easily accessed
- Securely stored
When to ask

- As part of any risk assessment (new evaluation or due to elevated concern of suicide or violence)
- Self-injury, physical violence, or related ideations, threats, or plans
- Concern of domestic / intimate partner violence
- Also: Substance use, anger issues, impulsivity
- Any accidental injury in the home, especially involving children
- Aging & dementia concerns
Eager for our guidance
Open to discussion
Judging us for asking
Gosh, I don’t know much about guns...

Would you describe your gun for me?
How do you store your guns at home?

How many guns do you have at home?

Tell me about the guns in your home.
If you needed a gun, how would you get it?

How long would it take you to get a gun?
Asking about access

A: Access
E: Experience
I: Ideation or Intent
O: Operational plan or practice
U: Unconcerned with consequences
Warning signs (PHASES)

- Proximity change
- Hostility / Hatefulness
- Acquisition despite exclusion
- Substance use
- Escalating purchases
- Suicidal or hopeless
Spend $50 on a gun safe? Get a $50 gun safe…
On changing lightbulbs

Behaviors!
Engagement is the critical goal, and a predicate for safer storage.
Most patients are open to discussing safer storage (Betz et al 2016)

- Empathize with affect
- Engage on shared interests
- Focus on priorities
- Evoke commitment
- Planning first steps and follow up
- Agree – or agree to disagree
Make it easy, make it universal

- Brochures and educational material universally distributed, in waiting area
- “If you would like to learn more ask your clinician…”
- Digital signage
- Readily available locks to distribute (or clear instructions on accessing)
- “I know you have some lived experience, maybe you will find somebody who needs it…”
A retirement plan for the gun

- Triggers: driving issues, not recognizing family, missing/lost possessions or worries of possessions being stolen
- Part of end of life planning (will, living will, DPA, advanced directives)
- Who is the trusted friend to take the gun? (military buddy, partner, etc.)
- Making sure it is safely handed down to kids / grandkids in accordance with owner’s wishes (not taking the gun away)
May I offer some suggestions?

**Somewhere else** *(store it)*
- Respite storage programs
- At work
- Storage locker
- Safe friend/relative’s home
- Law enforcement agencies

**Sell it**
- Pawn it
- Buyback programs
- Gun dealers
- Armslist, etc.

**Safer: Secure it at home**
- Locked with ammo stored/locked separately
- Locks, safes
- Locked up + key removed
- Disassembled
General considerations

• If in a home with children or somebody in psychological crisis, should not be left unattended and unsecured
• Never handled while intoxicated
• Properly carried (in a holster, not a pocket)
• Properly stored (in a locked safe or case, not a drawer)
Key points

• Safer storage reduces the risk of firearm suicide and accidental shootings / negligent discharges
• Limited options for involuntary removal \(\rightarrow\) we need to focus on collaborative interventions
• Cross cultural problem with a motivational interviewing solution
Thank you!
Suggested Readings


