

EDITOR'S MESSAGE

The Challenges of Medicine

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Medicine is challenging. Added to this are the struggles our patients face on a day-to-day basis. They have been exposed to situations that were unthinkable or not common 20 years ago. Some of these situations have changed, for better or worse, due to societal problems.

In 2012, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) was challenged to decrease deaths in motor vehicle accidents. This was related to the epidemic of young people killed in car crashes. This led to multiple changes that have decreased the death rate, with an estimated 600,000 lives saved over the next 50 years. Over the years, we have made changes that have led to front and side impact protection, seat belts, air bags, and decreasing speed limits.

We can solve large problems with multiple causes by careful thought. In 2021, a public health expert noted that 48,830 Americans died by firearms. Averaging one death every 11 minutes, the firearm homicide rate in the United States is 25 times higher than other high-income countries and the firearm suicide rate is 10 times that of other high-income countries. This does not take into account firearms injuries, or the family burden when a person dies or is injured. Between 2019 and 2020 the firearm homicide rate increased about 35%.

How often do we wish we had an opportunity to speak to our patients, families, and community prior to a tragic event? Six out of 10 adults are concerned about gun violence. Children are also impacted. Gun violence can contribute to problems in mental health and cognitive development, and as physicians we are also responsible for assessing and treating survivors. Statements from the American Academy of Pediatrics and strategies and resources from the CDC that focus on youth, suicide, and violence are available.

While we understand the scope of the problem and the impact on our patients, you are likely doing all that can be done. The CDC recommends some simple community efforts that would help. These include street outreach programs to connect people with services to reduce tension. They recommend maintaining green spaces by clearing vacant lots and planting grass and trees in high-risk areas. As a society, we can also help by strengthening economic and household stability through housing assistance, childcare subsidies, and other methods to support families.

SOURCES

1. Liwei L. Hua, Janet Lee, Maria H. Rahmandar, Eric J. Sigel, Suicide and Suicide Risk in Adolescents. *Pediatrics* January 2024; 153 (1): e2023064800. doi: 10.1542/peds.2023-064800.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Violence Prevention," <https://www.cdc.gov/violence-prevention/index.html>.