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Conversations about safe firearm storage with patients: why and how

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Slide 1: Tips for providers on firearm safe storage conversations with patients

ROSE MARTIN

FAMILY MEDICINE CLERKSHIP ROTATION 4

COLCHESTER FAMILY PRACTICE

2020

#2 Problem Identification

Estimated 50.5% of Vermonters own at least one firearm

National Shooting Sports Foundation CEO says that **“record-breaking” firearm purchases during COVID have been largely made by first-time gun owners, who may not be familiar with safe storage practices**

On average, 64 Vermonters die by firearm suicide annually

- In addition, 86% of all gun deaths in Vermont are suicides

Safe firearm storage has been shown to make a difference in the number of gun-related injuries:

- There is a lower risk of self-inflicted firearm injuries and deaths in homes in which guns are stored securely
- Accidental firearm deaths in the United States decreased by 38% in the decade following the initiation of ChildSafe’s national campaign (2005-2015, per CDC) for gun safety in the home
- A 2019 study of a nationally representative sample of suicide decedents found that individuals living in households with safe storage practices were less likely to commit suicide using a firearm

#3 Unique Cost Considerations

Johns Hopkins' 2017 study of over 700,000 people who required treatment for a firearm-related injury demonstrated that firearm-related injuries account for over 2.8 billion dollars in emergency and inpatient care annually.

- Of note, more than 50% of patients in this national study were uninsured or self-paying— meaning the individuals either bear the burden of the charge, or the bill added to the overall uncompensated care provided by health care systems
- Moreover, this study failed to account for pre-hospital deaths or injuries for which the individual did not seek medical care. Thus, the cost of gun violence in this study is likely a low estimate.

#4 Community Perspective and Response to Issue

Two interviews recorded: one with a St. Albans native and former gun owner, and the other with a UVM Larner College of Medicine medical student.

The medical student noted that there **“have not been any school-specific lessons that discuss firearm safety.”** She responded that it would be **“helpful to see more examples of doctors counseling on the topic.”**

When asked if she thinks a clinical skills session on general safety (counseling re: smoke detectors, helmets, seatbelts/car seats, firearm storage) would be helpful, she says, **“definitely”** and notes that firearm safety could be incorporated into the social history we learn in the first year of medical school.

The Vermonter I spoke with owned more than 5 firearms for collecting and target shooting. He notes that **he has never been asked by a healthcare provider about firearms.** When asked if he would be open to a healthcare provider asking him how he stored his firearms, he says, **“yes, it makes sense why they would ask.”**

He notes that **he was not aware that many Vermont police departments offer free firearm locks for community members.**

#5 Continued

Available pamphlet that lists options for firearm storage with helpful categories on the right-hand side that highlight features of each option (e.g., “affordable,” “portable,” “theft deterrent”)

GUN STORAGE FOR YOUR LIFESTYLE

As a gun owner, you can choose from multiple options for safely storing and protecting your firearms when they're not in use. Use this guide to determine which mechanism best suits your lifestyle, priorities and environment.



A RANGE OF OPTIONS

 <p>CABLE LOCK Price Range: \$10-\$50</p> <p>A cable lock can be used on most firearms, allows for quick access in an emergency and offers security from theft. The cable runs through the barrel or action of a firearm to prevent it from being accidentally fired, requiring either a key or combination to unlock it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">AFFORDABLEACCESSIBLETHEFT DETERRENT
 <p>GUN CASE Price Range: \$10-\$150</p> <p>For those looking to conceal, protect or legally transport a registered firearm, a gun case is an affordable solution available in a variety of materials including plastic, fabric or metal. Be sure to lock it with an external device for added security.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">AFFORDABLEPORTABLEPROTECTS FROM DAMAGE
 <p>LOCK BOX Price Range: \$25-\$350</p> <p>With integrated lock, storage boxes provide reliable protection for firearms, and allow gun owners to legally transport them outside of their home.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">PORTABLEACCESSIBLEPROTECTS FROM DAMAGE
 <p>ELECTRONIC LOCK BOX Price Range: \$50-\$350</p> <p>Electronic lock boxes are an effective way to store or legally transport firearms, and they also prevent theft since only the person with the code can access the contents. Some electric lock boxes are specially designed for quick access to stored firearms.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">PORTABLETHEFT DETERRENTPROTECTS FROM DAMAGE
 <p>FULL SIZE AND BIOMETRIC GUN SAFES Price Range: \$200-\$2,500</p> <p>A gun safe protects its contents from the elements and allows owners to safely store multiple firearms in one place. Gun safes of all sizes are now available with biometric options to ensure only certain people have access.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">THEFT DETERRENTPROTECTS FROM DAMAGE

PLEASE HELP PREVENT ACCIDENTS. STORE FIREARMS RESPONSIBLY.

These are just a few of the storage options available to firearm owners. For the greatest level of security, consider using a combination of safety mechanisms and educate family members about handling firearms properly.

To learn more about firearm safety, visit ProjectChildSafe.org

#6 Results/Response

After the presentation, the providers and I discussed the renewed importance of this topic in the wake of COVID-19 and increased civil discord in the midst of the recent election.

We considered the persistent barriers to having discussions around firearms in settings where patients may feel uncomfortable or defensive about the topic.

Overall, feedback on the presentation was that it is helpful to have reminders of how to best approach oftentimes-sensitive topics like these.

#7 Effectiveness and Limitations

- To measure effectiveness, a quick 10-question assessment could be administered to gauge providers' knowledge levels about safe firearm storage.
- Alternatively, providers could be asked to participate in a survey to assess their comfort levels counseling on gun safe storage before and then after the presentation.
- As discussed previously, the effectiveness of counseling on firearm safe storage is limited by patient openness to the discussion, as well as provider time limitations.

#8 Recommendations for future Interventions

- Potential to incorporate lessons on gun safety counseling into medical school curriculum
- Would be helpful to assess specific barriers and concerns when broaching the topic of gun safety to be able to more directly address provider hesitations

#9 References

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