

Survey finds nurses willing to counsel patients on gun safety protocols after receiving hospital-led education

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A survey of nurses in the Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) Departments of Medicine and Psychiatry finds that the majority of respondents would feel comfortable assessing firearm access and providing patients with educational resources on safe gun storage if information were available. The results are published online in the September edition of the American Journal of Nursing.

"Gun violence in this country is preventable. Strategies to improve awareness and foster safer [firearm](#) practices can help address this public health issue and nurses have an important role to play in the process," says Kim Smith Sheppard, RN, clinical research nurse in the Translational Clinical Research Center at MGH and lead author of the report, "Nurses' Knowledge and Comfort with Assessing Inpatients' Firearm Access and Providing Education on Safe Gun Storage."

"Assessing a patient's access to firearms and educating them about safe gun [storage](#) might

prevent accidental shootings, suicides and homicides in our homes and communities," says Smith.

In March 2018, investigators conducted an [online survey](#) of 21 nurses from MGH's inpatient [psychiatric unit](#) and 21 of their colleagues from a general medicine floor. The survey was designed to assess each respondent's level of comfort assessing a patient's firearm access and educating patients about safe gun storage, along with other factors, ranging from knowledge of current Massachusetts firearm safety laws; barriers to discussion; to preferred methods of educating patients and nursing instruction.

More than 50 percent of respondents were unfamiliar with Massachusetts safe gun storage laws and none of the 42 nurses surveyed previously received formal training on how to educate others on firearm safety or safe gun storage. Despite the lack of familiarity, 80 percent of respondents from each unit expressed comfort in offering patient education on safe gun storage if it were available. Most respondents said printed materials, patient education pamphlet, coupled with an informed conversation, would be the preferred method of information exchange.

Smith Sheppard noted that those surveyed from the general medicine and psychiatric units endorsed a one-hour nurses training led by a multidisciplinary panel which could include a review of national gun violence statistics; review of pertinent literature; information on at-risk populations; and, guidance for nurses on how to talk to patients about firearm safety and storage.

Smith Sheppard says, "Our results open the conversation about inpatient nurses playing a role in education. We spend significant time with

patients and develop relationships with them; this could be an opportunity for nurses to provide education on safe gun storage."

The authors' findings can also influence the development of [nurse](#) trainings and hospital-based policies that may improve firearm storage practices. A follow-up study launched in February 2020 will poll a larger cohort of MGH nurses to gather more data from other specialized units within the hospital. A [gun violence](#) prevention class is being developed by a multidisciplinary committee within the hospital's Nursing and Patient Care Services department.

More information: Kimberly Smith Sheppard et al. Original Research: Nurses' Knowledge and Comfort with Assessing Inpatients' Firearm Access and Providing Education on Safe Gun Storage, *AJN, American Journal of Nursing* (2020). DOI: [10.1097/01.NAJ.0000697636.34423.45](https://doi.org/10.1097/01.NAJ.0000697636.34423.45)

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