Model to Reduce Unintentional Firearms Injury and Death: Safety Through Education

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It seems like hardly a day goes by that a shooting is not reported in the media. After each shooting, the rhetoric is predictable and partisan.[1] Democrats favor stricter gun control laws, whereas Republicans favor expansion of gun rights.[1,2] Many physicians consider firearm violence to be a public health issue, yet federal funding to study this issue is lacking.[3] The rhetoric soon dissipates, and nothing changes.

Firearm ownership in the United States continues to increase, with most gun owners reporting gun ownership for personal protection.[2] As of 2009, there were an estimated "310 million firearms available to civilians in the United States."[4] At that time, the number of firearm suicides and unintentional deaths was 18,735 and 554, respectively.[4] Regardless of one's ideology regarding firearm ownership, all parties should agree that reducing unintentional death and injury from firearms is necessary. How to achieve that goal, however, remains elusive. (Although prevention of intentional and mass shootings certainly deserves attention, that topic is outside the scope of this essay.)

Education is an important factor in mitigating firearms-related unintentional injury and death and suicide. Areas to concentrate on would include topics such as safe firearm handling and operation; proficiency; safe firearms storage; children and firearms; risk prevention; recurrent training; federal and state legal issues (eg, permit requirements and restrictions); carry methods (open and concealed); and ballistics. A module on suicide prevention that addresses proper storage and the signs and symptoms of suicidal ideation and mental illness may also mitigate death via suicide, but further research is needed.[5,6] There would be separate modules for handguns, rifles, and shotguns, including classroom, home study, and range instruction.

Currently, firearm education is provided by organizations such as the National Rifle Association, the Second Amendment Foundation Training Division, the International Association of Law Enforcement Firearms Instructors, local instructors, local ranges, and distance programs. Many educational courses require the student to bring a firearm and ammunition. However, this requirement presents a significant obstacle when the course is not in the state in which the student resides.

Interstate travel to the course location would require transporting a firearm by airline, rail, or automobile. The McClure-Volkmer Act of 1986, known as the Firearm Owners Protection Act (FOPA), revised the Gun Control Act of 1968 and specified regulations for interstate transport of firearms by automobile. The firearm must be unloaded, cased separately from ammunition, and kept in a locked storage compartment not readily accessible.[7] Notwithstanding this federal law, state laws vary considerably. Although a transported firearm may be legal in the state of origin and destination, it may be illegal in a contiguous state through which the traveler passes. Examples would include magazine capacity and rifles deemed to be assault weapons by a particular state. Some municipalities may have additional firearms laws not preempted by state law, and some states require that "in the course of travel, shall include only such deviations as are reasonably necessary under the circumstances."[8] The term "such deviations" is vague. Eventually the traveler will need to stop for fuel, food, lodging, or relief. Would these be considered reasonably necessary deviations? What about mechanical trouble or a motor vehicle accident?

Traveling by air to or through a restrictive state can also be problematic.[9-11] The hodgepodge of laws presents a significant obstacle to travel for the purpose of firearms education if the student is

required to bring a firearm and ammunition. Law-abiding travelers following the FOPA could find themselves committing a felony in a state with strict firearm laws.[12] There is no uniform state law that governs firearm transportation.[13] To expect any reasonable person to be an expert on the firearms laws of multiple states for the purpose of travel is not realistic.

If firearms education is to be a tool to mitigate unintentional firearm injury and death, then a better system is needed. In fact, a reasonable educational model does exist: Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requirements to obtain a private pilot certificate. In this model,[14] the student takes instruction (ground and flight lessons) from an FAA-certified flight instructor, either privately or through a flight school, and he or she must pass a written examination, oral examination, and flight test, after which the private pilot certificate is granted. This federal certificate is valid in all 50 states. This general aviation model could be extrapolated to a firearms model on a voluntary basis. Mandatory participation would not be tenable, as it would infringe on the right to keep and bear arms enshrined in the Second Amendment to the US Constitution.

In this model, there would be 2 parts. Part 1, similar to Parts 61 and 141 in the Federal Aviation Regulations (FAR),[14] would include certification requirements for firearms knowledge, firearms proficiency, and experience. Training, educational courses, and practice would all be documented in a logbook. Training would occur under the auspices of a federal certified firearms instructor, offered privately or through accredited organizations, at in-state training facilities or out-of-state facilities that provide firearms and ammunition for training purposes. Upon completion of course requirements, written, oral, and practical examinations would be administered by a federally recognized firearms examiner. The student would then receive a firearms certificate from the US government. The requirements to become a federally certified firearms instructor would include a separate syllabus and examination in all firearms-related technical subjects.

Part 2 of the model would include General Operating and Firearms Rules, similar to Part 91 of the FAR.[14] Here it would be explicitly documented that certificate holders are federally licensed to transport firearms pursuant to the FOPA to any US state for the purpose of education (eg, recurrent training, additional courses); may travel by air, rail, or automobile; may stop for any lawful purpose; and upon arriving at the destination, may transport the firearms to and from the place of residence and the educational facility. These rules would be federal and would supersede any state or municipal rules. Recurrent training would be biannual, similar to the Flight Review in general aviation. This model differs from the Concealed Carry Reciprocity Act,[15] which, if enacted, would still be subject to state law.

There are potential criticisms to this model. First, it would require another federal agency, therefore adding a layer of bureaucracy, which might be interpreted as an infringement of the Second Amendment. However, this model would protect the firearm owner from prosecution when traveling with firearms and provide education for the purpose of mitigating injury. This program would be voluntary and therefore not an infringement of the right to keep and bear arms. In exchange for safe passage protection, the firearm owner would have to agree to a program of firearms education.

Second, those living in a more firearm-permissive state, such as a "shall issue" (permits issued to all law-abiding citizens) or "constitutional carry" (no permits required) state may dismiss such an educational program. However, firearm owners in those states are still subject to the laws of more restrictive states ("may issue" states) when traveling. This model would not infringe on existing shall issue and constitutional carry laws.

Third, such a program would require funding and cost to the participant. However, the purpose of this proposed model is to enhance firearm safety and mitigate unintentional firearm injury and death by increasing access to education. A voluntary educational program based on the FAR curriculum for general aviation could serve as a model to achieve this goal. Granting participants federal protection for firearm transport to acquire education would be an incentive to participate in this program.
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Correction

The authors regret an error that appeared in the following article:

Martingano D, Renson A, Martingano AJ, Martingano FX. Variations in progression and regression of precancerous lesions of the uterine cervix on cytology testing among women of different races. *J Am Osteopath Assoc*. 2018;118(1):8-18. doi:10.7556/jaoa.2018.003

Where progression and regression rates are reported in the abstract (page 8, second-to-last sentence of the results), results (page 13, first column, second paragraph), and Figure 3 (caption), progression and regression rates should have been reported in months rather than years. The rates should have appeared as follows:

- For the fastest expected progression rate, which was found among Hispanic patients: 17.6 months; 95% CI, 11.5-25.5.
- For the fastest regression rate, also among Hispanic patients: 27.6 months; 95% CI, 21.5-35.6.
- For the slowest expected progression rate, which was found among black patients: 28.1 months; 95% CI, 14.6-47.2.
- For the slowest regression rate, also among black patients: 49 months; 95% CI, 29.1-86.2.

In addition, the x-axis label for Figure 3A should have been "Months" instead of "Years." (doi:10.7556/jaoa.2018.017)