



NEWS

US doctors react to criticism from National Rifle Association

Owen Dyer

Montreal

Doctors across the United States reacted sharply when a tweet from the National Rifle Association suggested that they should “stay in their lane” rather than join the debate on gun control. The tweet, which came in response to a position paper from the American College of Physicians, was written just hours before a gunman killed 12 people at the Borderline Bar in Los Angeles.

The American College of Physicians’ paper was published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*.¹ The NRA first reacted with an editorial on its website, then with a tweet linking to that editorial. The tweet said, “Someone should tell self-important anti-gun doctors to stay in their lane. Half of the articles in *Annals of Internal Medicine* are pushing for gun control. Most upsetting, however, the medical community seems to have consulted NO ONE but themselves” (<https://twitter.com/NRA/status/1060256567914909702>).

The tweet triggered an online backlash, much of it from emergency department physicians and others who work amid the consequences of gun violence, under the hashtags #ThisIsMyLane and #ThisIsOurLane.

Kristin Gee, from Los Angeles, was one of several physicians who posted photographs of their own blood soaked scrubs and shoes, writing, “To the @NRA, this is what it looks like to stay in #mylane . . . I speak for this patient, for their parents who will never be the same, for every person who came after this one and didn’t have to” (<https://twitter.com/kmgee9/status/106113518496325632>).

Joseph Sakran, director of emergency general surgery at Johns Hopkins Medicine in Baltimore, a city notoriously troubled by gun violence, asked the NRA, “Where are you when I’m having to tell all those families their loved one has died?”

“Do you have any idea how many bullets I pull out of corpses weekly?” asked Judy Melinek, a forensic pathologist in San Francisco. “This isn’t just my lane. It’s my fucking highway.”

“My lane is a pregnant woman shot in a moment of rage by her partner,” wrote Stephanie Bonne, a trauma surgeon in Newark, New Jersey. “She survived because the baby stopped the bullet. Have you ever had to deliver a shattered baby?”

Bonne also wrote of “asking families to identify their child by their tattoos, because their faces are unrecognizable.”

The *Annals of Internal Medicine* also responded, tweeting, “We pledge to talk to our patients about gun violence whenever risk factors are present.”

The NRA has sponsored proposed legislation in several states that would stop pediatricians and family doctors asking patients about guns in the home. Such a law was passed in Florida in 2011 but was struck down in a federal court.

Data published this summer by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed that the US death toll from firearms rose in the past two years, after decades of steady decline, with most of the increase in urban areas.² Data recently published in *JAMA Pediatrics* show that about 8300 children are admitted to US hospitals each year with firearm injuries, of which roughly 40% are accidental.³

- 1 Butkus R, Doherty R, Bornstein SSHealth and Public Policy Committee of the American College of Physicians. Reducing firearm injuries and deaths in the United States: a position paper from the American College of Physicians. *Ann Intern Med* 2018;(Oct). 10.7326/M18-1530. 30383132
- 2 QuickStats: Number of homicides committed, by the three most common methods: United States, 2010-2016. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2018;67:806. 10.15585/mmwr.mm6729a4 30048424
- 3 Gani F, Canner JK. Trends in the incidence of and charges associated with firearm-related injuries among pediatric patients, 2006-2014. *JAMA Pediatr* 2018;(Oct). 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2018.3091. 30383089

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