Dementia and Firearm Safety

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1. Question for the Viewers

How would you rate your understanding of firearm injury risks in the older adult population?

A. High level
B. Moderate level
C. Low level
D. Other (please type in chat)
Firearm Injury and Older Adults

Firearms Among Older Adults

In the US, 40-60% of adults with AD/ADRD may own a firearm or have one in the home.

Firearms in America: Reasons for Ownership

Protection
Handguns

Sports Shooting
Long Guns
Violence and Older Adults

Suicide and Older Adults

Key Facts:

- Suicides are a leading cause of death for older Americans.
- Firearms are the most common method for suicide among older adults.
- Firearms are lethal 85–90% of the time when used as a method for suicide.

Dementia and Suicide Risks
Dementia and Suicide Risk

Increased Risk of Suicide Attempts
Mild Evidence
MCI/Dementia Diagnosis

Mild-Moderate Dementia
Mild Evidence

Advanced Dementia
Decreased Risk of Suicide

Interpersonal Theory of Suicide

Assumptions on the Interpersonal Theory of Suicide:

Perceived Burdensomeness
"I am a burden."

Thwarted Belongingness
"I am alone."

Capability for Suicide

Diagnosis of MCI/early dementia

Lethal or near lethal suicide attempts

Threatened Entanglement

Turn alone?

20% of caregivers report having experienced violence from a loved one with dementia.
Practical Solutions: Clinical Assessment

**Mild cognitive impairment**
- Mild memory loss
- Disorganized thinking
- Impaired ADL, though may require more effort

**Mild dementia**
- Moderate memory loss, forgetting < 10%
- Patient aware of some deficits but not fully impaired
- Visually impaired

**Moderate to severe dementia**
- Severe memory loss, interfering with multiple ADLs
- Impairments in function
- Usually has personality and behavior changes
- May not recognize family, friends

Sources: Patel D, et al. (2015); @EmmyBetz

**Screening Questions**

**Recommendations**
- Testing/refer for treatment
- Assessment/evaluation by firearms specialist
- Educate and counsel patient/family about supervised (or restricted) access to home firearms
- Should not have access to any firearms
- Consider co-medication risk as greater for certain and behavior, depression, or personality problems
- Family/support system should remove firearms and ensure restrictions are followed

**Clinical Features**
- Mild memory loss
- Disorganized thinking
- Impaired ADL, though may require more effort

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**Moderate to severe dementia**
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Practical Solutions: Planning

- Use Online Planning Tools
- Create a Written Plan
- Practice Safe Storage at Home

Example: Safety in Dementia

Examples: Trigger locks, lock boxes, gun safes

Question for the Viewers

Does your state or jurisdiction have specific laws targeting gun violence among persons with dementia?

A. Yes (please share in chat)
B. No
C. I'm not sure
D. Other (please type in chat)
Federal Law: Gun Ownership

The following persons are prohibited from owning:

- Felons
- Fugitives
- Persons with Addiction
- Underage
- Danger to self or others or "lack the mental capacity to contract or manage their own affairs"
- Involuntary hospitalizations
- Non-citizens unlawfully in the United States
- Has an active restraining order
- Has been convicted of domestic violence

State Laws: ERPO and Dementia

Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs) are a potential tool to reduce gun violence among persons with dementia.

States with ERPO/GVRO Laws

Source: Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence (2020).
ERPO: Extreme Risk Protection Orders

**What is it?**
- Civil court order
- Prevents firearm access to high-risk individuals
- Based on behaviors

**What does it do?**
- No new firearms (background check would prevent)
- Relinquish existing firearms

**What behaviors are covered?**
- Violence
- Threats of self harm
- Dangerous mental/health crises
- Abuse of alcohol/drugs

**Who can file?**
- Close family member
- Roommate
- Employer/Employee
- Law Enforcement Officer

Firearm Transfers

**Washington firearm safe storage map**

Source: Harborview Injury Prevention and Research Center, GoogleMaps

Key Takeaways

- **Takeaway 1:** Suicide is the primary risk with firearms for older adults.
- **Takeaway 2:** Firearms are the most common mechanism for suicide and are used with increasing frequency as we age.
- **Takeaway 3:** Specific recommendations for firearm safety and planning are available for persons with cognitive impairment and dementia, and they vary by disease stage.
- **Takeaway 4:** Certain policy tools such as ERPOs may help protect people in situations where a person is demonstrating concerning behavior.
A Chat with Laura Prater

Allene Mares

Laura Prater

QUESTIONS?

To ask a question, please click the icon in the Zoom toolbar to open your Q&A Pod.

Resources

- Forefront Suicide Prevention
  University of Washington
  https://intheforefront.org/

- Three Interventions Toolkit
  Harborview Injury Prevention & Research Center
  https://hiprc.org/3interventionstoolkit/

- Safety in Dementia
  Tools to help people make decisions about safety and dementia.
  https://safetyindementia.org/

- Giffords Law Center
  Gun Law and Policy Resources
  https://giffords.org/gunlawcenter/gun-law/