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
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
Homicide & Suicide for Older Adults in the U.S.

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 80–90% of the time when used as a method for suicide.
Dementia and Suicide Risks
Dementia and Suicide Risk

Increased Risk of Suicide Attempt*

MCI/Dementia Diagnosis

Mixed Evidence

Mild-Moderate Dementia

Mixed Evidence

Advanced Dementia

Decreased Risk of Suicide

Source: Günak MM, Barnes DE, Yaffe K, Li Y, Byers AL. (2021)
Interpersonal Theory of Suicide

Assumptions on the Interpersonal Theory of Suicide:

- Perceived Burdensomeness
  - "I am a burden."
  - Diagnosis of MCI/early dementia
- Thwarted Belongingness
  - "I am alone."
  - Desire for suicide
  - Capability for Suicide
- Lethal or near-lethal suicide attempts

20% of caregivers report having experienced violence from a loved one with dementia.

Clinical, Individual, and Family Solutions
Practical Solutions: Clinical Assessment

Mild cognitive impairment
- Mild memory loss
- Objective cognitive deficits on testing
- Intact ADL, though may require more effort

Mild dementia
- Moderate memory loss, interfering ≥1 ADL
- Patients aware of some deficits but lack full insight
- Possible behavioral symptoms (like hostility or delusions)

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

Sources: Patel D, et al. (2015); @EmmyBetz
Practical Solutions: Clinical Assessment

**Mild cognitive impairment**
- Access to firearms at home
- Judgment, insight, personality changes
- Depressive symptoms

**Mild dementia**
- Access to firearms at home
- Judgment, insight, personality changes
- Depressive symptoms

**Moderate to severe dementia**
- Access to firearms at home

**Screening Questions**
- Access to firearms at home
- Judgment, insight, personality changes
- Depressive symptoms

**Recommendations**
- Testing/referral for treatment
- Assessment/training by firearms specialist
- Engage in planning
- Educate and counsel patient/family about supervised (or restricted) access to home firearms
- Should not have access to any firearm
- Consider immediate risk if patient has access and behavior, depressive, or personality problems
- Family/support system should remove firearms and ensure restrictions present

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

Sources: Betz, et al. (2018); @EmmyBetz
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)
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
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
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.
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/lawcenter/gun-laws/