55th KZGN News Talking Points Editorial
By: Tom Wiknich

Should doctors ask patients about guns in their homes?

Today’s editorial is brought up in response to a story from the Huffington Post yesterday targeting the National Rifle Association on their website. They were taking a poll to get people’s opinion on whether doctors should be restricted from discussing guns in the homes where there are children. Apparently, doctors are asking patients whether they own guns or not.

Here’s the online Huffington Post story: Tell the NRA: stay out of our doctor's offices. This year, gun deaths are set to surpass car accidents as the leading cause of death of young people for the first time ever. But even so, the gun lobby claims that gun violence isn't a public health issue — and they're going so far as to push legislation to make it illegal for doctors and pediatricians to ask their patients about gun ownership. It's a doctor's duty to ask questions about things that affect their patients' health and well-being. That's why the medical community considers talking to parents about safe firearm storage just as important as discussing the risks associated with swimming pools, second-hand smoking, and riding without car seats or seat belts. NRA-backed bills have been introduced all over the country to punish pediatricians who ask parents whether they have guns in their homes, and to prohibit doctors from recording this information in medical files.

The American Medical Association, the country’s biggest association of physicians, has come out against these “gag order” laws because research has shown that parents who talk about gun storage with their children’s pediatricians are more likely to adopt safe and responsible gun storage practices. That’s the story from the Huffington Post.

On the surface it sounds sort of reasonable. However, I’d like to see this “research study” they refer to. When you analyze the issue and consider the constitution, this is not appropriate for many reasons:

1.  Gun deaths for children are up. Don’t forget this covers up to 18-year olds. It also includes all the gang shootings involving 17 and under. We hear reports daily about inner city gang shootings going through the roof.

2.  In California, deaths are going up because the state is releasing more and more criminals under court order, and in response to the voter initiative lowering quite a few felony crimes to misdemeanor crimes. Thereby, no jail time. These people don’t care about safe gun storage.

3.  Discussing guns is not the same as discussing swimming pools, car seats etc. Owning guns is a constitutionally protected right.

4.  Many gun owners don’t want people to know they have guns. This is private information and no one’s business.

5.  Doctors keeping a record of who has guns is an invasion of privacy. Who knows who might get hold of those records? With more records stored electronically, how about hackers getting the records?

Whether there are guns in the home is none of the doctors business. Parents are put in a very awkward position when asked this question. If a patient doesn’t believe it’s any of the doctors business, then the patient is forced to lie. This is very uncomfortable and not appropriate. If I was asked that question, I’d ask the doctor. I’ll answer you if you answer my questions: Where do you live? Do you have guns? How many guns do you have? Do you lock your guns up? Do you have kids? Do you use car seats? Does anyone in your home smoke? Will you provide me all your bank account information? Will you provide me your credit card info? A doctor’s office has all sorts of information about their patients in a file. The NRA has taken a strong approach to making efforts to stop this practice. The NRA is trying to stop this practice. Hey, if the doctors want to encourage gun storage safety, then let them just print a flyer describing such, and hand it out to patients. Then there would be no invasion of privacy. No record kept and no uncomfortable environment for patients. Let me make one point clear. The NRA and 99% of gun owners believe in responsible gun ownership. The last thing any one of them wants to happen is for a child in the home to get unsupervised access to any gun. The worst thing that can happen is a child shooting another child accidentally. This can be and should be prevented. But it has nothing to do with doctors’ care for their patients. It has to do with the anti-gun ideology being spread by liberals. The statistics anti gunners use to support their position is flawed. To use crime numbers in their basis for child shootings is wrong. Again, guns should be stored properly and kept out of the hands of unsupervised children. But, it’s not the doctors place to advise.

In conclusion, it’s no doctor’s responsibility to ask about whether a patient has guns in the home. It’s none of their business.

I’m Tom Wiknich, and that’s what I think. I’d like to know what you think. If you have any comments about this editorial, or would like to discuss or recommend a topic, I’d like to hear from you. Please e mail them to info@kzgn.net.