NH Gun Shop Project: Engaging Firearm Dealers in Suicide Prevention

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Project Impetus

- Three suicide deaths in six days within hours of gun purchase from a single NH gun shop
- Gun shop owner, firing range instructor, suicide prevention and firearm advocates and public health researchers meet to determine if there is an effective way to respond
- Built on previous collaborative work of the NH Firearm Safety Coalition
Recent-purchase Suicides

- About one in ten (8%) firearm suicides in NH are with recent-purchase guns
  - “Recent purchase” = buying or renting firearm within one week of suicide (usually within hours)
  - 8% is likely a slight underestimate; in two-thirds of cases interval between acquisition and death was not noted

Source: Medical examiner reports on all 144 firearm suicides in NH over two-year period ending 6/30/09
Mission

Enlist gun shop owners in efforts to prevent suicides with either *recently-purchased* firearms or *existing* household firearms

- Educate gun shop owners about steps to avoid selling a firearm to a suicidal customer
- Educate their customers about making firearms less accessible if a friend or family member is suicidal
- **Promote National Suicide Prevention Lifeline to link with local crisis centers and other emergency services**
Project Launch

• Gun Shop Packets mailed out to “all” independent gun shops (63) and firing ranges (2)

• They included:
  – Cover letter signed by recognized gun advocate
  – Tip Sheet on avoiding sales to suicidal customers
  – 11th Commandment Brochure
  – Suicide Prevention Poster and Lifeline Cards
  – DVD made for firearm retailers by firearm retailers
Tip Sheet

Your vigilance could save a life!

• Signs that a buyer could be suicidal
• Options for responding to a potentially suicidal buyer
• What else can I do?
11. Consider temporary off-site storage if a family member may be suicidal. When an emotional crisis (like a break-up, job loss, legal trouble) or a major change in someone’s behavior (like depression, violence, heavy drinking) causes concern, storing guns outside the home for a while may save a life. Friends as well as some shooting clubs, police departments, or gun shops may be able to store them for you until the situation improves.
CONCERNED ABOUT A FAMILY MEMBER OR FRIEND?

ARE THEY SUICIDAL?

- Depressed, angry, impulsive
- Going through a relationship breakup, legal trouble, or other setback?
- Using drugs or alcohol more?
- Withdrawing from things they used to enjoy?
- Talking about being better off dead?
- Losing hope?
- Acting reckless?
- Feeling trapped?

SUISIDES IN NH far outnumber homicides

FIREARMS ARE THE LEADING METHOD

ATTEMPTS WITH A GUN ARE MORE DEADLY than attempts with other methods

HOLD ON TO THEIR GUNS

- Putting time and distance between a suicidal person and a gun may save a life.

- For other ways to help, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK [8255].

www.nolire.org
Evaluation Results

● 60 gun shops visited
● 48% were using at least one of the items
● Beliefs about preventability predict material use.
  - Removing access to lethal means can save a life
    YES - 69% display vs NO - 41% display
  - Belief that suicides are planned in advance
    YES - 45% display vs NO - 86% display
● Little negative feedback from customers
● Good feedback from gun shop owners
● Many states are working on adapting the project
Conclusions

• Suicide prevention is a good fit for gun owners who can be a powerful ally

• Most of us are neither strongly pro-gun or strongly anti-gun but almost everyone is ANTI-SUICIDE

• Getting across the idea that suicide is (mostly) preventable is essential!

• Work locally to get these messages out through gun shops, shooting clubs, firearm training, etc.
Project Dissemination

- Las Vegas – gun show displays, gun safe raffles
- Tennessee – visiting gun shops individually
- Maryland – promoting materials through a statewide gun shop owners association
- New England – exploring including suicide prevention in firearm safety training