Everyday ethics: Addressing gun violence

Q As an RN working in the labor, delivery, and post-partum unit, I've witnessed the impact of gun violence on patients and families, both through direct injuries and broader psychological effects. Given the growing concerns about safety in healthcare settings, would it be ethically appropriate—and perhaps even imperative—for professional nursing organizations to explicitly address gun violence in their strategic priorities? How should nurses advocate for this inclusion while remaining aligned with professional and ethical standards?

A Provision 9.3 of the 2025 *Code of Ethics for Nurses (Code)* stipulates the role of nurses and the nursing profession in advancing the nursing vision of a good and healthy society. Professional nursing organizations and nurses have the ethical responsibility and collective power to confront public health crises such as gun violence. The *Code* calls for nurses and nursing organizations to "dismantle structural barriers to a good and healthy society," including addressing the systemic contributors to violence.

To ethically and effectively address gun violence and related public health issues, nursing organizations can take several actions. *Assess and align strategic plans* with the core nursing values of health, safety, and advocacy. If gun violence is absent from the current mission or goals, it's ethically appropriate to revise these documents to reflect nursing's role in protecting communities. *Support nurses as advocates and allies* by creating platforms for them to engage in policy reform, education, and community partnerships aimed at reducing gun violence. *Influence social and structural determinants of health* by promoting legislative and public health initiatives that address the root causes of gun-related harm. *Work with public health professionals to create cohesive messaging* that combats misinformation and disinformation.

Provision 9.2 of the *Code* asserts that the nursing profession has a commitment to provide care to all members of society, thereby upholding the public's trust. This trust can be carried out, in part, through deliberate and intentional education in advocacy and allyship to create just systems. With regard to gun violence, individual nurses have a vital role to play. *Integrate trauma-informed care* and violence prevention education into patient interactions. *Raise concerns* when organizational plans fail to reflect urgent public health needs. *Participate* in or initiate efforts to include gun violence prevention in curricula, clinical discussions, research, and continuing education. *Collaborate* with interprofessional teams to create awareness and prevention strategies in healthcare and community settings.

In 2024, the U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy declared gun violence a public health crisis, a landmark decision aligned with the American Nurses Association's (ANA) decades-long stance on the urgent need to address firearm safety and violence prevention. ANA is committed to working alongside public health professionals, policymakers, and community leaders to address gun violence and to support those affected by this public health crisis.

The *Code* emphasizes that nursing envisions a good society—not a perfect one—where dignity, respect, justice, and compassion are upheld for all. In the context of gun violence, nurses are called to acknowledge societal imperfections and work toward meaningful, sustainable change. Each nurse can contribute based on their unique strengths, helping to build safer, healthier communities through advocacy, education, and compassionate care, in alignment with the core values of the profession. AN

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