

A History of Gun Violence Prevention of the NHMS and AMA

By Dr. Leonard Korn

It is sad and ironic that gun violence has increased dramatically during the COVID pandemic, with surging gun purchases, vastly increased murders and gun related injuries. And yet in our legislature in New Hampshire, we are seeing more attempts to lessen restrictions on firearms which undoubtedly will increase such danger with firearms. During the last two months, I have represented New Hampshire Medical Society (NHMS) in testimony at the State House opposing a number of bills that would reduce sensible restrictions on the ownership and operational aspects of gun use. This year there is even a Constitutional amendment CACR 8 to disallow any legislation that would restrict gun ownership and use in New Hampshire.

In this *Member's Corner* article, I will outline the history of NHMS and AMA actions in responding to the issue of gun violence. I will follow up with a second *Member's Corner* article shortly on discussion of recent bills in the legislature relaxing restrictions on firearm ownership and use in New Hampshire and introduce several proposals for expanding our NHMS policies on gun violence prevention.

In June 2013, the NHMS conducted a survey of New Hampshire physicians in order to determine the issues physicians thought NHMS should focus on in their advocacy positions. In that survey, 65% of physicians supported addressing gun violence as a public health issue. As a result, the NHMS created a Subcommittee on Violence as a Public Health Issue in late 2013 and appointed me as Chairman with Gary Sobelson and Rob Kiefner as members of that subcommittee which subsequently proposed three policy positions on gun violence. They were debated and the following policies on firearm safety were adopted in March 2014 that the NHMS:

1. Supports universal background checks on all firearm purchases.
2. Opposes firearm purchase by individuals who have been involuntarily committed for mental health services, with allowance for restoration of those rights by court petition.
3. Supports the use of gunlocks and other safety devices that will reduce accidental injury and death from firearms.

In November 2017, I was elected president of NHMS, with my focus that year on gun violence prevention. In response to the mass shootings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas high school in Parkland Florida, Council passed the following policies on firearm safety in March 2018 by unanimous vote:

1. Support repeal of the Dickey and Tiahrt Amendments (amendments that thwart research into firearm violence) and support research by CDC and other government agencies on gun violence and firearm safety, and support dissemination of research findings and advocacy of firearm safety proposals based on such research and data.
2. Ban the sale and ownership of all assault-type weapons, bump stocks and related devices, high capacity magazines of more than 10 bullets, and high-velocity and armor piercing bullets.
3. Require the licensing of owners of firearms including completion of a required safety course and registration of all firearms.
4. Support local law enforcement by:
 - i. reinstatement of permitting process in NH such that local police chiefs are empowered to make permitting decisions;
 - ii. "gun violence restraining orders" for individuals arrested or convicted of domestic violence or stalking, and
 - iii. "red-flag" laws for individuals who have demonstrated significant signs of potential violence.
 - iv. supporting the importance of "due process" so that decisions would always be reversible by individuals petitioning in court for their rights to be restored.

5. Support physicians being able to have conversations with their patients about gun safety and encourage physicians to discuss concerns regarding firearm safety.

As NHMS president, I had the occasion to bring the concerns of gun violence to both AMA's New England Delegation meeting in May 2018 and then to the AMA Annual Meeting in Chicago in June 2018. It was at that AMA Annual Meeting that many of the NHMS policies on firearm safety were approved by the AMA House of Delegates (after much intense discussion) including the:

- ban on assault rifles and "bump stocks";
- limitation of high capacity of magazines of more than 10 bullets;
- requirement of licensing of all firearm owners and registering of all firearms;
- repeal of the Dickey amendment and the support of "red flag laws" for individuals who have demonstrated significant signs of potential violence.

In addition, the AMA at that meeting endorsed schools as gun-free zones (with exception of school-sanctioned activities and professional law enforcement officials), expanding domestic violence restraining orders to include dating partners and supporting increasing the legal age of purchasing firearms and ammunition from 18 to 21. The AMA also endorsed opposition to federal legislation permitting "concealed carry reciprocity" across state lines and supported gun buyback programs in order to reduce the number of circulating firearms.

It is my intent to bring three new proposals to the NHMS Council for debate that include advocating repeal of "stand your ground" laws, prohibition of the "ghost guns" in New Hampshire, and advocacy of schools as gun free zones. I will discuss those three additional firearm safety proposals in a second *Member's Corner* article but first I want to outline the history of gun violence prevention efforts of the NHMS over the last eight years and the specific policies of firearm safety NHMS and AMA have already adopted.