

Taking guns away from mentally ill won't eliminate mass shootings, psychiatrist says

October 16 2013

A string of public mass shootings during the past decade-plus have rocked America leaving policymakers and mental health experts alike fishing for solutions to prevent these heinous crimes. A Mayo Clinic physician, however, argues that at least one proposal won't stop the public massacres: restricting gun access to the mentally ill. J. Michael Bostwick, M.D., a Mayo Clinic psychiatrist and author of the editorial published online in *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* today, argues several points including that mass shootings are carefully planned—often spanning weeks or months. There is plenty of time for a meticulous planner and determined killer to get a gun somewhere in that time, he argues.

Dr. Bostwick's editorial is a commentary on an essay in the same issue of *Proceedings* titled "Guns, Schools, and Mental Illness: Potential Concerns for Physicians and Mental Health Professionals." The authors focus on recent [mass shootings](#) and argue that these actions were not and could not have been prevented by more restrictive [gun](#) legislation. They further contend that a diagnosis of [mental illness](#) does not justify stripping Second Amendment rights from all who carry such a diagnosis, most of whom will never commit violent acts toward others.

Before reading the essay Dr. Bostwick—who is generally in favor of gun control—expected to disagree with its contents. Instead, he agreed.

"We physicians generally do not know enough about firearms to have an informed conversation with our patients, let alone counsel them about gun safety," says Dr. Bostwick. "We also tend to ignore the reality that as

long as the Second Amendment is the law of the land, the right to bear arms and therefore personal gun ownership, whether of long guns for hunting or handguns for personal protection, will be an integral part of the American scene."

A few points Dr. Bostwick argues:

- Even if every mentally ill person in the country were registered, the system isn't prepared to handle them—and only about half of the states require registration.
- Only about 10 percent of mentally ill people are registered—and these are people who have been committed, they've come to attention in a way that requires court intervention.
- Literature says the vast majority of people who do these kinds of shootings are not mentally ill—or it is recognized after the fact.
- The majority of [mentally ill](#) people aren't dangerous.
- Mentally ill people in a country with gun rights, still have rights.
- Mass shootings are not just an American phenomenon—they have and are occurring in countries that have strong gun control.

"It is important to note that mass shooting are very different from murder and suicide," Dr. Bostwick says. "These conclusions should not be extrapolated either to other forms of murder—often crimes of passion in which there is typically only a single victim—or to suicide, a phenomenon that is more than twice as common as homicide in the United States and frequently an impulsive act. Research shows gun restriction among suicidal people works."

Provided by Mayo Clinic

Citation: Taking guns away from mentally ill won't eliminate mass shootings, psychiatrist says (2013, October 16) retrieved 1 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-10-guns->

mentally-ill-wont-mass.html

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.