

A Routine Clinic Session

Category: Gun Violence

written by Pamela Adelstein | June 24, 2022

I open the door, belt out a “hello,” and peer at the patient seated in the exam room I’ve just entered. My gaze is drawn to a homemade button pinned to their jacket and then to their T-shirt. Both depict a photo of their loved one who was a victim of gun violence. The victim’s dates of birth and death are imprinted below the photo. A quick mental subtraction reveals a life ended far too soon.

Soon I’m on to my next patient. The reason for this visit is chronic abdominal pain that began years ago—due to a gunshot wound. After initial surgery, a partial colon resection, the pain continued. Multiple exploratory surgeries followed, in the hope of pain mitigation, but to no avail. I sense that his abdominal pain is the energy of trauma, stuck in his belly.

Then the medical assistant informs me that my next patient is crying. They are drowning in grief—their grandchild, while at a graduation barbecue, was mistaken for a gang member and was murdered. Five years prior, their son was tragically killed by a stray bullet. So much senseless loss and deep pain.

My next patient needs to get home, so our visit is cut short. They are their daughter’s caretaker, since she was paralyzed by a bullet fired by a teenager, who also shot the girlfriend’s boyfriend, who was declared dead at the scene. Fact: no ambulance sirens are needed when transporting the deceased to a hospital.

Next, I need to draft some letters. First, a housing letter—my patient has requested a housing transfer because random gunshots at night trigger their anxiety and PTSD. Next, I refer a child to Dot Rx, a program that brings opportunities for exercise to patients. Fact: parents cannot allow their children to play outside their homes, lest they be shot by a stray bullet.

In the hallway, I spot a patient of mine and say hello. As they wave, I note a black-and-white tattoo spanning their biceps—the name and date of death of their friend, a homicide victim.

I return to my computer. My clinic’s homepage invites employees to join the Mother’s Day Walk for Peace, started so that mothers impacted by homicide could receive support and love from their neighbors.

Hours later, on my drive home, I turn on the radio. Hearing the news, I gasp: another school shooting ...

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