Our Nation’s School Nurses Call Us to Action to Address Gun Violence

Every day school nurses enter our nation’s schools ready to care for and serve 55 million children. Each day they wonder if their school will be next – next in the line of fire. They ask themselves: “If not now, then when?”

According to a recent analysis (Cai & Patel, 2019), there have been 111 school shootings in our country since 1970 – the most recent in Highland Ranch, CO (May 2019). Last year alone, there were three particularly violent incidents in which 29 people were killed and 48 injured in Parkland, FL, Sante Fe, TX, and Benton, KY. These shootings have traumatized generations of students. Our students, faculty, and staff now must include active shooter drills, lockdowns, and lights out in their daily routines to fight back the dangers of gun violence in their schools. Fighting back will take more than practice and attempts to create security and safety; it will take a fierce urgency of now and collective action by nurses.

“The fierce urgency of now,” as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. so eloquently put it, calls on us to take immediate action in order to address gun violence for what it is: a public health crisis. Nurses are and must be change agents and public advocates to address the crisis of gun violence.

Answering the Call

Who better to answer that call than nurses, who are at the forefront of this crisis, where community violence meets school violence in classrooms, hallways, and on school grounds? Nurses know best how to adapt to and tackle tough situations and life-threatening circumstances.

Whether it’s an active shooter ravaging the safety of our nation’s schools, or the slow mass shootings that happen in communities across the country, our children are suffering. Violence and revenge are partners in wreaking havoc on innocence and, when coupled with access to weapons, cause death and destruction in the most innocent of spaces.

It is time to stop and recognize the fierce urgency of now to address the heinous outcomes of gun violence that cause our children to lose their lives and deprive them of their futures.

As nurses, we interpret the fierce urgency of now to call on our President, Congress, and our nation to stop dithering and wasting time, and get down to the business of eradicating gun violence once and for all in our schools, in our communities, and in our places of worship.

Simply put, we call on our leaders to respond with deliberate action and speed. In no uncertain terms, we mean, “Do it now! Produce results! We have no more time to waste!”

We can start by providing federal funding for gun violence prevention research. We must have a clear path forward that is based in science, much like how public health research informed safe speed limits and seat belts. More data are crucial to crafting a public health approach – and devising a plan accordingly – that stems physical and emotional violence.

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We can also address the safe storage of firearms today. Let’s start by providing gun safety locks at all health fairs and back-to-school nights across the country.

Protecting Our Children

Minute-to-minute, hour-by-hour, school nurses are faced with the root causes of violence, address suicide prevention, and find evidence-based solutions to secure the health and well-being of children and youth. However, underlying this effort is the question of who will help keep our children safe. This question stays in and on our minds; it fuels the work that we do.

Nothing is more important than the safety and well-being of our nation’s children. School nurses remain relentless in their commitment to work with other health professionals, researchers, and policymakers in demanding results. Now is the time to do something about gun violence; let’s make our call to action so loud, it is impossible to ignore.

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