

I15 Firearm-Bearing Rates During Neuropsychiatry Hospital Admission

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Learning Overview: The goal of this presentation is to assess the demographic characteristics and psychiatric diagnostic profiles of subjects admitting to a psychiatric hospital while bearing a firearm.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic sciences community by drawing attention to the importance of securing a hospital environment and reducing the potential risks for violence and/or suicide.

Most completed suicides and homicides are reported to be committed with firearms. Although psychiatrists are in a strategic place to reduce firearm morbidity and mortality, the number of studies investigating the practices of firearm risk management is limited.

Data was pooled from the hospital databases to evaluate the admissions to a neuropsychiatry hospital with a firearm between January 2011 and December 2016. The medical files of the subjects who were reported to have a gun with them were evaluated.

Data revealed that 384 (0.0074%) of 51,666 subjects admitted to the hospital had a firearm. Forty-four individuals who were admitted to the hospital with a firearm were excluded due to readmissions, so 340 subjects were included in the study. A clear majority of the subjects who were admitted to the hospital with a firearm were males (96.7%, $n=329$). The diagnosis of the subjects with a firearm were as follows: anxiety disorders 18.2% ($n=62$), major depressive disorder 13.8% ($n=47$), alcohol- and substance-related disorder 22.9% ($n=78$), schizophrenia 7.6% ($n=26$), bipolar disorder 8.5% ($n=29$), and other disorders 3.5% ($n=12$). Additionally, 25.2% ($n=86$) of the subjects who were admitted with a firearm were recorded as being a visitor of an inpatient. Although 340 subjects were admitted to the hospital with a firearm, 254 of them were patients and only 157 (61.8%) of the patients were registered as a “gun owner” on the medical files. In the cases of the other 32.2%, the gun ownership status of the patient was not detected by the psychiatrist or psychologist.

It is concluded that during admission to the hospital, a careful security search for the presence of weapons is necessary. Electronic equipment such as metal detectors can assist in detecting firearms and securing the hospital environment. Considering the multitude of psychiatric patients carrying weapons, a more detailed psychiatric evaluation must be considered in gun license applications. Strategies must be developed for effective gun owning prevention without exacerbating stigma or discouraging psychiatric patients from seeking treatment.

Mental Illness, Firearm, Admission