There's a Reason They Choose Schools

A retired surgeon, Timothy Wheeler is the director of Doctors for Responsible Gun Ownership, a national group of physicians, medical students, scientists, and others who support — and advocate for — gun rights as well as the safe and lawful use of firearms. DRGO is associated with the Claremont Institute, a conservative think tank. Wheeler's writing has appeared in the Washington Times, the National Review Online, and other publications.

Background on gun violence as a public health issue More than thirty thousand people are killed every year by gun violence. As Wheeler's essay suggests, many physicians and health-care experts view this problem as a public health issue — and even a public health crisis. Wheeler cites the 2007 issue of the American Medical Association's Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness, which focused on the Virginia Tech massacre. The AMA, the largest association of physicians in the United States, has long viewed the problem in a public health context. After the 2013 shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut, the AMA and fifty-two other medical organizations sent a letter to President Barack Obama. The signatories advocated several proposals, including an assault weapons ban, increased mental health services, and more research on violence prevention. In the past, the government funded extensive research for studying (and reducing) gun violence at the Centers for Disease Control, but gun rights advocates, including the NRA, lobbied for legal restrictions on the CDC, requiring that "[n]one of the funds made available . . . may be used to advocate or promote gun control." Such public health research is not limited to the public sector, of course. For example, the University of Chicago Crime Lab, founded in 2008, explores the causes and effects of gun violence in the United States. For gun rights activists such as Wheeler, these physicians, researchers, and health-care experts too often put the "emphasis on guns and not on the humans who misuse them."

Wednesday's shooting at yet another school has a better outcome than most in recent memory. No one died at Cleveland's Success Tech Academy except the perpetrator. The two students and two teachers he shot are in stable condition at Cleveland hospitals.

What is depressingly similar to the mass murders at Virginia Tech and Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania,* and too many others was the killer's choice of venue — that steadfastly gun-free zone, the school campus. Although murderer Seung-Hui Cho at Virginia Tech and Asa Coon, the Cleveland

* Eds. note — On October 2, 2006, Charles Carl Roberts shot five students and injured five others in an Amish one-room schoolhouse.
shooter, were both students reported to have school-related grudges, other school killers have proved to be simply taking advantage of the lack of effective security at schools. The Bailey, Colorado, multiple rapes and murder of September 2006, the Nickel Mines massacre of October 2006, and Buford Furrow’s murderous August 1999 invasion of a Los Angeles Jewish day-care center were all committed by adults. They had no connection to the schools other than being drawn to the soft target a school offers such psychopaths.

This latest shooting comes only a few weeks after the American Medical Association released a theme issue of its journal *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness*. This issue is dedicated to analyzing the April 2007 Virginia Tech shootings, in which thirty-two people were murdered. The authors are university officials, trauma surgeons, and legal analysts who pore over the details of the incident, looking for “warning signs” and “risk factors” for violence. They rehash all the tired rhetoric of bureaucrats and public-health wonks, including the public-health mantra of the 1990s that guns are the root cause of violence.

Sheldon Greenberg, a dean at Johns Hopkins, offers this gem: “Reinforce a ‘no weapons’ policy and, when violated, enforce it quickly, to include expulsion. Parents should be made aware of the policy. Officials should dispel the politically driven notion that armed students could eliminate an active shooter” (emphasis added). Greenberg apparently isn’t aware that at the Appalachian School of Law in 2002 another homicidal Virginia student was stopped from shooting more of his classmates when another student held him at gunpoint. The Pearl High School murderer Luke Woodham was stopped cold when vice principal Joel Myrick got his Colt .45 handgun out of his truck and pointed it at the young killer.

Virginia Tech’s 2005 no-guns-on-campus policy was an abject failure at deterring Seung-Hui Cho. Greenberg’s audacity in ignoring the obvious is typical of arrogant school officials. What the AMA journal authors studiously avoid are on one hand the repeated failures of such feel-good steps as no-gun policies, and on the other hand the demonstrated success of armed first responders. These responders would be the students themselves, such as the trained and licensed law student, or their similarly qualified teachers.

In Cleveland this week and at Virginia Tech the shooters took time to walk the halls, searching out victims in several rooms, and then shooting them. Virginia Chief Medical Examiner Marcella Fierro describes the locations of the dead in Virginia Tech’s Norris Hall. Dead victims were found in groups ranging from one to thirteen, scattered throughout four rooms and a stairwell. If any one of the victims had, like the Appalachian School of Law student, used armed force to stop Cho, lives could have been saved.
The people of Virginia actually had a chance to implement such a plan last year. House Bill 1572 was introduced in the legislature to extend the state's concealed-carry provisions to college campuses. But the bill died in committee, opposed by the usual naysayers, including the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police and the university itself. Virginia Tech spokesman Larry Hincker was quoted in the Roanoke Times as saying, "I'm sure the university community is appreciative of the General Assembly's actions because this will help parents, students, faculty, and visitors feel safe on our campus."

It is encouraging that college students themselves have a much better grasp on reality than their politically correct elders. During the week of October 22-26, Students for Concealed Carry on Campus will stage a nationwide "empty holster" demonstration (peaceful, of course) in support of their cause.

School officials typically base violence-prevention policies on irrational fears more than real-world analysis of what works. But which is more horrible, the massacre that timid bureaucrats fear might happen when a few good guys (and gals) carry guns on campus, or the one that actually did happen despite Virginia Tech's progressive violence-prevention policy? Can there really be any more debate?

AMA journal editor James J. James, M.D, offers up this nostrum:

We must meaningfully embrace all of the varied disciplines contributing to preparedness and response and be more willing to be guided and informed by the full spectrum of research methodologies, including not only the rigid application of the traditional scientific method and epidemiological and social science applications but also the incorporation of observational/empirical findings, as necessary, in the absence of more objective data.

Got that?

I prefer the remedy prescribed by self-defense guru Massad Ayoob. When good people find themselves in what he calls "the dark place," confronted by the imminent terror of a gun-wielding homicidal maniac, the picture becomes clear. Policies won't help. Another federal gun law won't help. The only solution is a prepared and brave defender with the proper lifesaving tool — a gun.

Comprehension

1. What does Wheeler see as "depressingly similar" (2) about the sites of recent mass shootings?

2. The American Medical Association devoted an entire issue of one of its journals to dealing with tragedies such as school shootings. How does Wheeler view the AMA's reaction and policy proposals?

3. According to Wheeler, what do the AMA journal authors "studiously avoid" (5)?