

By Timothy W. Wheeler, MD  
Director, Doctors for Responsible Gun Ownership  
A project of the Second Amendment Foundation

Across America people, especially parents of young children, are finding out that the medical establishment does not respect their Second Amendment rights. Routinely their doctors ask them such questions as:

*“Do you have any guns in the home? Do you keep them unloaded and locked up? Did you know that if you keep a gun in your home you are more likely to be a homicide victim?”*

There is a reason that many doctors now ask these questions. It has nothing to do with gun safety and everything to do with politics. The American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, and other groups have adopted official policies urging doctors to probe their patients about guns in their homes. They profess concern for patient safety. But their real motive is political prejudice against guns and gun owners. And that makes such intrusive questioning a form of unethical physician conduct called a **boundary violation**.

Doctor-patient sex is the most well-known and sensational example of a **boundary violation**. But there is also a wide variety of nonsexual violations. These cover such issues as finances, confidentiality, and gratification of the doctor's needs.

Boundaries in the doctor-patient relationship must be set because of the relationship's unequal nature. A patient comes to a doctor often in a dependent, anxious, and exploitable state. In such a state of mind, the patient relies heavily on the physician to act only in the patient's interest and not the physician's. A doctor must put the patient's needs before his own. A doctor who takes advantage of the patient's position to push a political agenda is committing a type of **boundary violation**.

There is a place for doctors' inquiries about guns. A delusional, paranoid patient or a severely depressed patient with suicidal intent are examples of life-threatening medical conditions where intervention is needed. But these examples are not what the American Academy of Pediatrics has in mind when it urges doctors to advise patients to get rid of their guns.

What really reveals organized medicine's anti-gun bias is its refusal to recognize groundbreaking criminology research on guns. For decades, criminologists have studied firearms, their use and misuse, their risks and benefits. The science proves that private gun ownership by responsible citizens not only is safe, but protects the individual and his community from violent crime.

And Kansans also know from their own experience that as a group they are well qualified to safely own guns in the home and for self-protection. Kansas is one of the 49 states that have adopted laws allowing good citizens to discreetly carry a firearm for self-defense. Of course, this also means safely keeping that gun at home.

But the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) begins a section of its parent counseling brochure with the warning, “The safest home is a home without guns.” (<http://www2.aap.org/connectedkids/ClinicalGuide.pdf>, page 31 of 89). The medical doctors who wrote this advice had no training in firearm safety or home defense in medical school or residency. But one, Dr. Katherine Christoffel, was quoted in an AMA journal as saying “Guns are a virus that must be eradicated.” (*American Medical News*, January 3, 1994, page 9)

Further, the AAP states in its official policy on firearms, “Health care professionals should counsel the parents of all adolescents to remove guns from the home or restrict access to them.” (<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2012/10/15/peds.2012-2481.full.pdf> page 7 of 10).

This advice would be news to the parents of kids who compete in the Kansas State Rifle Association’s Camp Mary Dell Junior Shooting Camp. These kids could teach the doctors a thing or two about gun safety. And what about the millions of dollars the NRA and the National Shooting Sports Foundation spend on gun safety education for kids? But neither the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Family Practice, nor the American College of Physicians have ever partnered with these real experts in teaching gun safety to kids. They don’t even mention these resources to their patients. What does that tell you about their motives?

To conclude, gun safety education is vital to the health of our children and our communities. That’s why gun owner organizations take it so seriously. But doctors are not experts in guns. And unfortunately, their national and state leaders have taken it upon themselves to push gun control in the examination room. That is unethical conduct from a doctor. And it should not be tolerated.

*—Timothy W. Wheeler, MD is a surgeon licensed to practice in California. He is the founder and director of Doctors for Responsible Gun Ownership (DRGO), a nationwide group of 1,300 medical doctors, scientists, medical students, and others who support the safe and lawful use of firearms.*

*Dr. Wheeler’s firearm training includes California’s Hunter Safety Training Certificate, the Lethal Force Institute’s course “The Judicious Use of Lethal Force,” and the Tactical Firearms Training Team’s Tactical Pistol I and II courses.*

*More information is available at DRGO’s web site [www.drgo.us](http://www.drgo.us)*