



# Mass Murder, Non-Treatment of Severe Mental Illness, and Available Firearms: The Perfect Storm

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**T**his issue of *Psychiatric Annals*, ably guest-edited and partially written by C. Ray Lake, MD, PhD, deals with the good-old, American phenomenon of mass murder.

Although there may be a political argument about freedom and the right to bear arms in this country, there is not much to argue about with regard to this country's failure to provide treatment to its seriously mentally ill citizens, not to mention its returning war veterans. Add the free availability of firearms, the country's drug and alcohol problems, and the 7.7 million Americans suffering from schizophrenia and bipolar disorder (with only 40% of those with schizophrenia and 51% of those with bipolar disorder receiving treatment), and you have the perfect storm for mass murder. And this does not even take into account the incarcerated mentally ill.

After Congresswoman Gifford's tragic shooting, the Sheriff of Pima County pointed to his jail and said, "This is our only mental health treatment facility in the county," and Arizona cut its mental health budget by 37%.

Now, this is not a simple fix. As clinicians, we know that many of the most distrustful, paranoid individuals (the ones cited as being at risk for becoming a mass murderer) will often exert their right to refuse treatment and medication. Providing effective treatment for this population requires programs that provide living support and intelligent outreach. It would seem, though, that a society such as ours could do better, by making treatment available for its most vulnerable (and potentially dangerous) citizens.

Like so many difficult problems, however, it all comes down to values and the willingness to spend money wisely for effective and available treatment programs.

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