Surprise Assault On Gun Ownership

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The gun-control lobby is on the warpath in a most surprising venue. A group called Doctors Against Handgun Injury is calling on doctors, including psychiatrists, to ask their patients nosy questions about their gun ownership.
As far back as we can remember, doctors have vigorously opposed any interference with the confidentiality of the doctor-patient relationship. We could always count on medical associations to defend patient privacy against any invasion by government, the media or others into personal medical records.

Psychiatrists have been outspoken in the past about the importance of patient-doctor confidentially because trust in the doctor is particularly important. Their patients are usually in a very vulnerable and exploitable state of mind.

Somehow, this is changing under a new onslaught by the gun-control lobby. It has lined up a coalition consisting of the American Psychiatric Association, the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and ten other medical organizations claiming a membership of 600,000 doctors.

The Doctors Against Handgun Injury plan to engage in what it calls "upstream intervention." That means using regular medical checkups to ask patients about firearm ownership and storage in their homes and warn them of the risks of this behavior.

But that's not all. Doctors Against Handgun Injury is also calling for changes in public policy, such as mandatory background checks on buyers at gun shows, limits on the number of guns an individual can buy, and a waiting period for all gun purchasers.

Will patients no longer see their physician as a trusted professional in whom they can confide their most private facts about mind and health? Will the physician instead be perceived as an arm of the government prying into their private lives, or as a spokesman of a special-interest advocacy group pursuing a political agenda?

Doctors should be especially leery of this project because of the 20th century experience of medicine under Soviet Communism and Nazism. The Nuremberg War Crimes Trial showed how the German medical profession became a collaborator with the Nazi regime by collecting data on their patients that were then used against them.

Unfortunately, some gun-control lawmakers are trying to lock doctors into the ban-the-gun agenda. A bill now under consideration in the California State Legislature would require pediatricians to subject children and their parents to all sorts of nosy questions about "family, environmental, and social risk factors," including whether there are guns in the home and whether their parents spank them.

You would think that the American Medical Association (AMA) would be shouting from the housetops against this government and outside interference with private medical practice, but it looks like the AMA has joined the ban-the-guns movement. The AMA uses its publications, including its Journal (JAMA), to publish biased research with preordained conclusions, such as "easy gun availability results in crime."

The AMA has plenty of money to pursue its political agenda, which is increasingly left-liberal, and it doesn't have to depend on the support of member doctors. Two-thirds of the AMA's annual $200 million operating budget comes from sources other than membership, which has now dwindled to only a third of U.S. physicians.

A principal source of AMA wealth is a contract (kept secret from 1983 to 1998) with the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) by which HCFA requires all doctors to buy the AMA codes and use them to bill the government and third-party insurance carriers for all medical services. Failure to use the AMA codes accurately may result in government accusations of fraud and abuse, and prosecution and imprisonment.

The taxpayer-financed Centers for Disease Control (CDC) is also climbing aboard the ban-the-guns movement. It is trying to broaden the scope of public health to include the banning and confiscation of all handguns, the restrictive licensing of owners of other firearms, and the eventual elimination of all guns from private ownership except for a small elite of wealthy collectors, hunters and target shooters.

CDC spokesmen propagate the myth that most of the perpetrators of violence are ordinary citizens rather than criminals by trade. The fact is that the typical murderer has a prior criminal history of at least six years with four felony arrests before he commits murder, and 75 percent of all violent crimes are committed by six percent of hardened criminals and repeat offenders.

We don't have to look very far to observe the tragic loss of liberty in countries that have gone down the road of banning private gun ownership or using doctors to collect confidential data on their patients to serve a political agenda. Fortunately, Attorney General John Ashcroft has just reaffirmed the constitutional principle that the Second Amendment "protects the private ownership of firearms for lawful purposes."