

## **The Joint Episcopal-Lutheran Gun Violence Prevention Task Force**

Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles  
Southwest California and Pacifica Synods,  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

### **History:**

The Joint Task Force was formed as a result of a Resolution at Diocesan Convention adopted December 5, 2015.

### **Mission Statement:**

Consistent with our mutual baptismal covenant to strive for justice and peace and to respect the dignity of every human being, the Joint Task Force on Gun Violence Prevention educates, engages and equips our communities for sustained effort to prevent the epidemic of gun deaths and injuries.

### **Resources for Engaging Parishes in Gun Violence Prevention:**

Below you will find a wide range of resources that addresses various forms of gun violence and specific ways in which parishes can be engaged in prevention. There are resources for addressing gun suicides, unintentional shootings by children, guns used in domestic abuse situations, and situations in which a person is exhibiting behavior that might be a "red flag" for a gun tragedy.

### **Are You Called to Address Gun Violence in Your Congregation?**

**The Joint Gun Violence Prevention Task Force of the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles and the Southwest California and Pacifica Synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is ready to serve as a resource. Here are some steps that communities of faith can take to address gun violence. The task force can provide resources for each.**

**1. Gun violence prevention is a faith issue aligned with our baptismal promises to serve others and work "for justice and peace." Be clear that reducing the epidemic of gun violence is an appropriate topic for church. A good resource is Rev. Gary Hall's article, "Why Gun Violence is a Religious Problem," an excerpt**

from the book, *Reclaiming the Gospel of Peace: Challenging the Epidemic of Gun Violence*, Sharon Pearson, Editor. You can find the article at this web address: [goo.gl/vTAigs](http://goo.gl/vTAigs)

**2. Consider the many ways that gun violence impacts every area of parish life. Reducing and preventing violence weaves through every area of parish ministry.**

- **Liturgy:** Through preaching, prayer, hymns, and anthems as well as participating in activities like Rachel's Day and the Gun Violence Prevention Sabbath, communities of faith are reminded of our calling to stand with the victims of gun violence and to work to prevent deaths and injuries.
- **Pastoral Care:** A healing response to gun violence addresses tragedies in the congregation and community and helps raise awareness of gun suicides and the intersection of gun violence and domestic abuse. Share information on the new California Firearms Restraining Order that provides a way for firearms to be temporarily removed from someone at risk.
- **Children/family/youth:** Emphasize safe storage for gun owners. Participate in the ASK Campaign (Ask to Save Kids) that encourages parents to ask about gun safety when they send their child to play at another home. Are there guns in the home? Are the guns and ammunition adequately secured?
- **Adult education:** Sponsor discussions, speakers, films, and book studies supporting gun violence prevention.
- **Social justice advocacy:** Engage in letter writing and attend meetings with elected officials to support gun violence prevention, particularly from a faith-based perspective.
- **Public witness:** Display banners, hold vigils, and support public events in your community to support gun violence prevention.

**3. Suggestions for getting started:**

- **Engage the clergy and the Church Council or Vestry to support the work on this issue. The Vestry Resolution on Gun Violence Prevention, All Saints, Pasadena, October 2013 (available from the Task Force) or the**

**ELCA Resolution on Community Violence ([goo.gl/sR44Kc](http://goo.gl/sR44Kc)) can serve as a model for violence reduction work.**

- **Provide educational materials for your congregation. The Resource Packet from the Joint Task Force covers a range of related areas such as gun suicides and the relationship between mental illness and gun violence. It also includes suggestions for ways that these topics can be addressed within a parish.**
- **Plan an educational event at your congregation.**
- **Be intentional about incorporating music and liturgy that focuses on gun violence prevention.**
- **Learn about the experiences of congregations that have a Gun Violence Prevention Task Force that can be used in your congregation.**
- **Add annual gun violence prevention events like Rachel's Day, National ASK Day, or Gun Violence Prevention Sabbath to your calendar.**
- **If you are interested in advocacy or legislation on gun violence prevention, contact members of the Joint Task Force who are members of the California Firearms Strategy Group, a state-wide coalition that analyzes state legislation and sets priorities for advocacy. These members can provide current information on legislation and help identify where advocacy is most needed.**

A full range of faith based resources and suggestions for congregational involvement are available from the Joint Task Force.

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## **Gun Violence Prevention Resources for Communities of Faith**

Episcopal-Lutheran Gun Violence Prevention Task Force  
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Gun violence takes the lives of 92 people every single day in this country. Our faith traditions, sacred texts, and baptismal covenant all call on us to engage in peacemaking and in actions that honor the worth and dignity of every human being. This epidemic of gun violence calls out for bold and faithful action. The Episcopal-Lutheran Gun Violence Prevention Task Force provides these resources to engage individuals and parishes in sustained action to help prevent all forms of gun violence: homicides, suicides, and unintentional shootings.

### **Grounding Our Work In Our Faith**

Former Bishop Jon Bruno, Diocese of Los Angeles, encourages parishes to address gun violence in this article, “Remaining Vigilant Against Gun Violence,” Episcopal News Weekly, October 12, 2014. <https://goo.gl/EPw3qr>

Former Episcopal Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori presents “Proposals to Reduce Gun Violence: Protecting Our Communities While Respecting the Second Amendment.” Testimony to the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights, February 12, 2013. <https://goo.gl/LnMTYm>

The Very Rev. Gary Hall, Dean of Washington National Cathedral through December 2015, preached this sermon on the Sunday following the shootings in Newtown, CT; it is entirely focused on the call to communities of faith to confront gun violence. <https://goo.gl/t0UnH3>

The ELCA Conference of Bishops adopted “A Pastoral Letter on Violence” on March 4, 2013. The Bishops wrote this letter to the church in the wake of the shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School. It includes links to a short list of social statements on violence, peace, and criminal justice. <https://goo.gl/KJAFuM>

Lutheran congregations’ responses to gun violence in their communities are described in this article from the *Living Lutheran*: “Congregations Respond to Gun Violence,” November 13, 2015. <https://goo.gl/93fhKN>

Gun Violence 101 Cheat Sheet: Responding to the Call to Prevent Gun Violence. Published by Church & Society of the United Methodist Church.

<https://www.umcjustice.org/documents/51>

## Resources for Worship Services, Vigils, and Remembrance Events

“A Litany for Gun Violence Prevention” was written by the Episcopal bishop of Maine in 2016. <https://goo.gl/zaRh2p>

Women of the ELCA provides resources to observe Rachel’s Day, a time set aside to begin conversations in congregations about gun violence and its impact on children. The attached brochure gives ideas for Bible study and congregation events. It also includes a litany of lament and hope. <https://goo.gl/FByIKq>

Christian Worship Resources is the Children’s Defense Fund’s 40-page collection of liturgies, litanies, prayers, and scripture readings, some of which focused on gun violence. An Episcopal liturgy for the Children’s Sabbath and a Litany on the Tragedy of Gun Violence are included. <https://goo.gl/zb2igF>

Alternate hymn texts that lament gun violence and that may be sung to familiar tunes can be found on The National Council of Churches’ website. Two tunes are in Evangelical Lutheran Worship, and one is in the Episcopal Hymnal.

<https://goo.gl/rLFGjo>

This guide to help faith leaders speak to congregants about gun violence prevention is a publication of Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence.

<https://goo.gl/0HLuJf>

A range of faith-based resources, including a number of sermons from Episcopal parishes, is available at the March Sabbath website. <https://goo.gl/USXB2s>

“A Litany on the Tragedy of Gun Violence” was written for Martin Luther King Day in 2010 and published by the Presbyterian Church (USA).

<https://goo.gl/0qe2hw>

A liturgy for the burial of a child can be found in *Enriching Our Worship 2* (Church Publishing Inc., 2000). Prayers for the death of a child by violence or suicide are included (see page 143-144). <https://goo.gl/LYfrMo>

## Study Guides

Episcopal Peace Fellowship's guide for several sessions of discussion, "Gun Violence Prevention," is available for sale through their online store:

<https://goo.gl/dphxH9>

"Gun Violence, Gospel Values: Mobilizing in Response to God's Call," is a study guide that provides an extensive faith-based foundation for engagement in this work. It can be ordered or downloaded here: <https://goo.gl/CynZB5>

*Reclaiming the Gospel of Peace: Challenging the Epidemic of Gun Violence*, edited by Sharon Ely Pearson (Morehouse Publishing, 2015), has questions for reflection and discussion for each chapter.

## Additional Resources

Interfaith statements (from Buddhist, Muslim, and Jewish perspectives) on gun violence prevention are included in the guide from Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence on pages 8-11. <https://goo.gl/0HLuJf>

Heeding God's Call, a faith-based movement to prevent gun violence, has developed a "Covenant of Commitment to Act to End Gun Violence."

<https://goo.gl/NFRM2d>

## Episcopal Groups

Bishops Against Gun Violence is an ad hoc group of nearly 60 Episcopal bishops who have come together to explore means of reducing gun violence and to advocate for policies and legislation that saves lives.

<http://bishopsagainstgunviolence.org/> This group has published a paper in support of universal background checks: <https://goo.gl/1p7H0x>

Episcopalians Against Gun Violence is an ad-hoc group of bishops, clergy and lay people disseminating information about Episcopalians who are working, collectively and individually, to curb gun violence. It has joined forces with Bishops Against Gun Violence, and they share a Facebook page and Twitter account (@TheCrossLobby).

Episcopal Peace Fellowship's Gun Violence Prevention Working Group has a range of resources: <http://epfnational.org/what-about-guns/> Information about its study guide is included in the Study Guides section.

## Regional Organizations

Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence has chapters throughout California. You can contact a chapter near you:

<http://www.bradycampaign.org/california-chapters>

Women Against Gun Violence, a Los Angeles based organization, has a Speaker's Bureau, and sends out e-newsletters with information about important actions and local events. By signing up for the e-newsletter you will get information about local events and timely actions. <http://wagv.org/>

## Gun Safety Information

By accurately framing gun violence as a public health epidemic we can more easily look at a wide range of prevention strategies and incorporate those into our communities.

Consider these statistics:

- 85% of youths under 18 who died by firearm suicide used a family member's gun, usually a parent's.
- 68% of school shooters used a gun from their own home or that of a relative.
- 60% of all child and teen gun deaths happen in a home.

Prohibiting access to guns by children is a crucial step in reducing gun violence.

The ASK (Asking Saves Kids) Campaign: Because unsecured guns can result in unintentional shootings, often involving children, this national campaign encourages parents and others with children in their care to raise the issue of safe storage of guns when they send a child to play in another home. For more information and to download brochures: <http://askingsaveskids.org/>

Gun Violence Restraining Order (GVRO): In California you can request a GVRO to remove ammunition and guns from the possession of a relative or household member who poses a danger to self or others. If you can demonstrate to a judge that the individual exhibits dangerous or threatening behaviors, the judge can order that person not to purchase or possess any firearms or ammunition for up to

one year. A lawyer is not necessary to obtain a GVRO. For more information, resources, and forms, see the California Courts website: <https://goo.gl/q7FL2O>

### Take Action:

1. Include gun violence prevention in sermons, litanies, and prayers.
2. Invite a speaker and hold a discussion on gun violence prevention. Resources for speakers include Women Against Gun Violence and Brady Campaign Chapters.
3. Establish a gun violence prevention task force or committee in your parish, or include gun violence prevention as part of your parish's peacemaking agenda.
4. Hold a discussion series using one of the faith-based study guides listed above.
5. Show a film and hold a discussion. "Living for 32" is a DVD featuring Colin Goddard, who survived the Virginia Tech shootings and is now a gun violence prevention activist. This film shows the importance of universal background checks. <http://livingfor32.com/>
6. Make available in your parish and preschools information and materials about gun safety and safe storage—like those from the ASK Campaign and Moms Demand Action.
7. Sign up for action alerts from gun violence prevention organizations. You will receive timely information about effective actions that you and your parish can take. The following are sources for news and action alerts:

Women Against Gun Violence, [www.wagv.org](http://www.wagv.org)

Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, [www.bradycampaign.org](http://www.bradycampaign.org)

Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, [www.csgv.org](http://www.csgv.org)

Moms Demand Action, <http://momsdemandaction.org/>

The Episcopal-Lutheran Gun Violence Prevention Task Force is available as a resource to your congregation! Please feel free to contact the co-chairs of the Task Force:

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## **Preventing Gun Suicides**

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A comprehensive approach to gun violence prevention includes suicides, the leading cause of gun deaths. It is essential to understand both the extent of gun suicides, as well as to provide accurate information about gun suicides in order to plan effective preventive strategies.

*Means Matter* is the focus of a program of the Harvard School of Public Health, which raises awareness about the use correlation between (1) the availability and use of guns as a method of suicide and (2) the rate of suicide.

Here are important facts from *Means Matter: Suicide, Guns and Public Health*, <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/>

- Suicides are approximately 2/3 of gun deaths.
  
- Although many people who die from suicide plan their act carefully, most don't. When people who nearly died from a suicide attempt are asked how much time passed between the time they decide to commit suicide and when they actually attempted suicide, 24% said less than 5 minutes, and 47% said an hour or less.
  
- About 3/4 of suicide incidents happen at home.
  
- More people use a firearm to suicide than all other means combined. 85% of firearm suicides are fatal. Other methods (with the exception of hanging) are much less likely to be lethal.
  
- Research shows that if a gun is available to someone considering suicide, a gun will be used.

- 90% of those who attempt suicide and survive--even though making very serious attempts--do not go on to die by suicide later.

- Suicide is the second leading cause of death for adolescents and young adults ages 10-24, and guns are also the most common method of suicide for this group (44%).

## **SAFE STORAGE OF GUNS AND PREVENTION OF GUN TRAGEDIES**

### **Safe Storage of Guns**

#### **Episcopal-Lutheran Gun Violence Prevention Task Force**

Diocese of Los Angeles • Southwest California and Pacifica Synods of the ELCA

Safe storage of guns is a top priority in gun violence prevention and can avert many gun tragedies, especially those involving children. As the blogspot. *Kid Shootings* says: "Every gun in the hands of a child must first pass through the hands of an adult". (1)

Consider these facts and implications for gun violence prevention:

1 in 3 handguns in American homes is kept loaded and unlocked. (2)

76% of children ages 5-14 know where firearms are kept in the home. (3)

Almost 2 children a week are killed in unintentional shootings. Almost 2/3 of these shootings take place in a home or vehicle that belonged to the victim's family. Another 19% take place in the home of a relative or friend of the family. (4)

85% of youth under 18 who died by firearm suicide used a family member's gun, usually that of a parent. (5)

69% of youth school shooters acquire their gun from their home. (6)

#### How congregations can address safe storage.

1. Make materials about safe storage available. The Everytown for Gun Safety "BeSMART" Campaign provides information about conversations parents can have

with other parents about accessibility to guns. You can download an information sheet, "Talking About Responsible Gun Storage", at [www.beSMARTforKids.org](http://www.beSMARTforKids.org)

2. Promote the ASK (Asking Saves Kids) Campaign, which encourages parents to ask this question when they send a child to someone's home: "Is there an unlocked gun in your home?" Educational brochures and a tool-kit with information and other resources are available in the resource section of the ASKing Saves Kids website: <http://askingsaveskids.org/>

3. Observe National ASK Day annually in June. This is a key opportunity to raise awareness of the ASK Campaign in your congregation. Congregations can include ASK information in sermons, have a resource table near Sunday School classrooms, and ask parents to sign a pledge to "ask". ASK Day materials and resources are available at: <http://askingsaveskids.org/>

4. Encourage youth who babysit to ask if there is an unlocked gun in a home where they will be caring for children. Youth may use a check-list, where this question is included in with other safety questions. This check-list is available from the Episcopal Lutheran Gun Violence Prevention Task Force, Patricia Terry [scottclayton1@msn.com](mailto:scottclayton1@msn.com) 310-783-0648, Virginia Classick [vclassick@aol.com](mailto:vclassick@aol.com) 818-516-1216, Pastor Dan Gibson [dwgibson61@gmail.com](mailto:dwgibson61@gmail.com) 323-371-1001.

5. Educate your congregation about the California safe storage laws and any local laws, if applicable. In California, people are criminally liable for negligently storing or leaving any unloaded firearm on their premises if a child is likely to gain access to it, regardless of whether the gun is actually used or taken away from the house.(7)

6. Encourage members of your congregation to approach their local school board, or individual principals, about participating in the School Memo Project. State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson has issued a letter urging all public schools to send a memo to their school community, informing them about the laws regarding safe storage of firearms. To see the memo (available in a number of languages) and Secretary Torlakson's letter to school superintendents which you can provide when you make this request, visit: <http://www.bradycampaign.org/ca-brady-campaign-applauds-ca-superintendent-of-public-instruction-tom-torlakson-for-bold-firearms>.

7. Raise safe storage in pastoral situations when you think someone may be at risk for gun violence.

8. Contact your local law enforcement office to learn the procedures for voluntarily surrendering a firearm.

1. <http://kidshootings.blogspot.com>

2. The Truth About Kids and Guns, Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence
3. Ibid.
4. Innocents Lost: A Year of Unintentional Child Gun Deaths, Everytown for Gun Safety
5. Means Matter, Harvard School of Public Health
6. The Truth About Kids and Guns, Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence
7. California Penal Code 25100 through 25125; 25200 through 25220.)

#### Resources

1. Innocents Lost: A Year of Unintentional Child Gun Deaths, Everytown for Gun Safety, 6/14 [http://everytownresearch.org/reports/innocents\\_lost/](http://everytownresearch.org/reports/innocents_lost/)
2. Laws pertaining to child access to guns (as well as all California guns laws) are available on the website of the Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence in San Francisco.

## **WOMEN AND GUNS**

### ***Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles, Gun Violence Prevention Task Force***

Men and women are both victims of violence, but violence against women looks very different from violence against men.

One key difference in the violence against women is who commits it. In the United States, women are much more likely to be victimized by people they know, while men are more likely to be victims of violence from strangers.

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 94% of female victims were murdered by a male they knew. And more than half of those murdered were killed with a gun. (*When Men Murder Women*, Violence Policy Center, 2013)

#### Domestic Abuse

From 2001-2012, 6,410 women were murdered in the US by an intimate partner using a gun -- more than the total number of US troops killed in action during the entirety of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars combined. (FBI Supplemental Homicide Data, U.S. Dept. of Justice, 2001-2013)

Women who are victims of domestic violence are eight times more likely to be killed if there is a gun in the home.

More than half of the mass shootings in recent years -- 57% -- have started with or involved the shooting of an intimate partner or family member. (Mayors Against Illegal Guns)

Being stalked is correlated with risk for physical violence and gun violence. One study of female murder victims found that 76% of women murdered and 85% who survived a murder attempt by a current or former intimate partner experienced stalking in the year preceding the murder. (Women Under the Gun, Center for American Progress, June 2014)

Whenever there is a situation of known or suspected abuse, asking about the presence of a gun is enormously important. In addition, women need to know the laws related to domestic abuse and guns.

The Brady background check system makes it illegal for someone with a felony conviction to purchase a gun. However, in the case of domestic abuse, anyone convicted of either a felony or misdemeanor crime is prohibited from purchasing a gun. This is a recognition of the extreme risk of gun violence when there has been any conviction related to domestic abuse.

#### Workplace Violence:

Homicide is also the leading cause of death for women on the job in the United States. In 2006, 77% of workplace homicides were committed with firearms. (2006 Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries)

#### Implications for Congregations

1. Place these domestic abuse posters in stalls in women's restrooms in all church buildings. Larger posters with emergency phone numbers specific to each county in the Diocese are also available from the Task Force. The posters provide important information, and are a validation that abuse can occur in any parish.

<http://thequibordcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/TearoffFlyer.pdf>

2. Los Angeles City Attorney Mike Feuer's office makes available information cards in Los Angeles County that provide phone numbers as well as a summary of the most important laws related to guns and domestic abuse. These are available in English, Spanish, Korean and Chinese. These are available from the Task Force.

3. Increase awareness among clergy and pastoral care staff about the high risk of guns in situations of domestic abuse.
4. Disseminate information about the California Firearms Firearms Restraining Order.
5. Provide education about teen dating violence in youth groups.

## **GUN VIOLENCE RESTRAINING ORDER**

### **Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles, Gun Violence Prevention Task Force**

The California Gun Violence Restraining Order (GVRO), also known as the Firearms Restraining Order (FRO), creates a mechanism for family members and household members to work with law enforcement to temporarily remove guns, and prevent the purchase of new guns, from persons who pose a potential risk to themselves or others.

Family members are often the first to know when a loved one is in crisis and this new tool will give them the opportunity to take action when they believe there is such heightened anger, hate, despondence, substance abuse, or a mental or emotional crisis that when combined with the possession or access to firearms would be dangerous. Prevention is the key here, and everyone's rights are safeguarded with the due process of our court system. We can give a gun back; however, we cannot give a life back.

Detailed information about the Gun Violence Restraining Order is available at:

**[www.speakforsafety.org](http://www.speakforsafety.org)**

#### **Implications for congregations**

1. Clergy and others involved in pastoral care should be familiar with the Gun Violence Restraining Order information and process for initiating the GVRO in their community, including the location of the nearest courthouse and hours when an application for a Gun Violence Restraining Order can be filed.

2. Make the Speak for Safety fact sheet or brochure visible in your parish.

This one-page flyer, available in English and Spanish, can be made widely available in parishes:

[https://speakforsafety.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/GVRO\\_English-i.e.-v4-2.pdf](https://speakforsafety.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/GVRO_English-i.e.-v4-2.pdf)

## **The Public Health Approach to Gun Violence Prevention**

Ours is a country with an epidemic of gun violence. Any factor causing death and injury of this magnitude is properly seen as a public health concern. Health care organizations and providers have long called for a public health definition and approach to gun violence prevention. An understanding of gun violence as a public health issue by the general public would help in reaching common ground on this often polarizing issue, as well as focus our national resources effectively on prevention.

The Center for Disease Control describes the public health approach as a four-step model: Define the problem, identify risk and protective factors, develop and test prevention strategies, and ensure widespread adoption of effective programs. (1) Dr. David Hemenway elaborates on this by emphasizing that the public health approach is population-based, rather than individual based, and is broad and inclusive, examining all possible interventions, including changing social norms, passing new laws, and trying to engage as many people and institutions as possible in a multifaceted way. (2)

Examples of a public health approaches to gun violence prevention:

- Supporting research and data collection
- Working to change social norms. Just as awareness has grown about having a designated driver, there can be increased awareness about attempting to remove access to guns by someone who might be at risk.
- Enlisting the entertainment industry in changing the way in which gun violence is portrayed in films and television shows.
- Supporting research and data collection
- Supporting "smart gun" or personalized gun technology which would only permit the owner of a gun to fire the weapon.
- Engaging health care providers in including access to guns in preventive health discussions.

### **Implications for Congregations:**

Faith communities have been involved in a number of preventive health collaborations and initiatives. Parish Nurse programs are a recognition of the importance of healing and care of the whole person. Recognizing gun violence

as a public health epidemic can help faith communities move from "it's too political" thinking to approaching the devastating loss of life and injuries caused by gun violence as a preventive health concern. We can use as models other successful public health campaigns and their effectiveness in reducing, for example, automobile fatalities and injuries, or deaths and illness from smoking.

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: The public health approach to violence prevention
2. Dr. David Hemenway, Public Health Approach to the Prevention of Gun Violence, Kelly Report of Congresswoman Robin Kelly. Dr. Hemenway is Professor of Health Policy at the Harvard School of Public Health.

The following organizations have called for an active public health approach to gun violence prevention: American Academy of Family Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics, American College of Emergency Physicians, American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, American College of Physicians, American College of Surgeons, and American Psychiatric Association.



