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April 18, 2019

The Honorable Robert R. Redfield, MD
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329-4027

Dear Dr. Redfield:

On behalf of the physician and medical student members of the American Medical Association (AMA), I am writing to encourage the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in collaboration with other public and private organizations, to develop recommendations or best practices for media (traditional and new media) coverage of mass shootings.

Research suggests that a mass shooting incident increases the probability of another mass shooting in the immediate future. Moreover, analysis of media coverage of mass shootings followed by imitation or copycat incidents of mass shootings indicate a possible media contagion effect. A similar contagion effect was demonstrated in the mid-1990s with suicides. Studies have demonstrated that appropriate media coverage of suicide may lead to a reduction in suicide rates and have led to the development of media coverage guidelines by the CDC, the World Health Organization, and media organizations. The AMA agrees that the way the media reports on an event can play a role in increasing the probability of imitation, and last November the AMA's policymaking arm, our House of Delegates, adopted new policy to encourage the CDC to develop recommendations or best practices for media coverage of mass shootings.

As you may be aware, recommendations for reporting on mass shootings have been developed through a consensus project led by Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (e.g., <https://www.reportingonmassshootings.org/>). The project included representation from national and international experts from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, the CDC, Columbia University, the International Association for Suicide Prevention Media Task Force, and other organizations. The Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERRT) at Texas State University and the Federal Bureau of Investigation have also developed a campaign to shift media's focus from the suspects who commit these acts to the victims, survivors, and heroes who stop them (see, <http://www.dontnamethem.org/>).

The Honorable Robert R. Redfield, MD

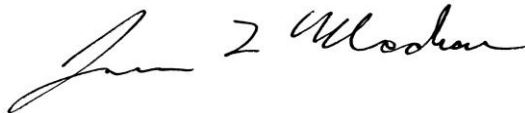
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The AMA encourages the CDC to review existing recommendations to determine if they might be an appropriate starting point or model, and work collaboratively with stakeholders to develop recommendations or best practices for media coverage of mass shootings. We recognize that the goal is not to prevent news coverage of mass shootings, but to assist the media in their efforts toward responsible and accurate reporting and reduce imitation or copycat mass shootings, which is a goal we all share.

The AMA appreciates the CDC's consideration of our request. If you have any questions or want to discuss this issue further, please contact Margaret Garikes, Vice President for Federal Affairs, at margaret.garikes@ama-assn.org, or by calling 202-789-7409.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "James L. Madara".

James L. Madara, MD