

# A Public Health Crisis

An Interview with Chethan Sathya, M.D. M.Sc.,  
 Pediatric Thoracic and General Surgeon, Associate Trauma Director, Cohen Children's Medical Center,  
 and Director, Center for Gun Violence Prevention, Northwell Health

**EDITORS' NOTE** *Dr. Chethan Sathya has served in his current role since October 2019. Additionally, he has worked as a freelance medical journalist for more than six years. He received his B.Sc from McGill University in Montreal, Canada, and went on to complete his Medical Doctorate (M.D.) and a residency in General Surgery at the University of Toronto. He completed fellowship training in Pediatric Surgery at Northwestern Medicine's Ann and Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago. He also holds a Master's in Clinical Epidemiology from the University of Toronto, in addition to completing a fellowship in Journalism at the Munk School of Global Affairs.*



Chethan Sathya

## Will you provide an overview of your role and main areas of focus at Northwell Health?

My specialty is pediatric surgery, hence I focus on treating infants, children, and adolescents with life-threatening medical conditions and injuries. A big part of the work that I do is in my role as associate trauma director at the Children's Hospital here. Sadly, many of the traumatic injuries we treat are from firearms, which is one of the reasons that Northwell Health's focus on gun violence prevention is an issue so dear to my heart.

I did my trauma surgery training in Chicago and I think that was a real wake-up call for me. I was astonished at how many children were being killed or disabled from gunshots. Pulling bullets out of babies did not feel normal to me on any level and something had to change.

That experience has been a quintessential element of what has driven me to do what I do. I'm very passionate about the trauma program at Northwell Health because whether it's gun violence or other means of violence prevention, we're uniquely positioned to address these issues as a public health crisis within the community and to lead the charge in implementing real ground-level preventative strategies.

## Will you discuss the emphasis Northwell Health has put on the Children's Hospital Trauma Center?

The trauma program here at the Children's Hospital is a very important element and special

entity within Northwell Health. The program was the first level-one pediatric trauma center in New York City and Long Island, and as a result, it is the largest and busiest pediatric trauma center within the state. I think that alone is a testament to the resources that Northwell has put into this program, and the same can be said for the adult trauma programs across the health system as well.

Northwell has made injury care for both adults and children a priority as evidenced by the numerous centers of excellence related to trauma and injury prevention that they have invested in, many of which combat issues beyond just injuries such as substance abuse, human trafficking, suicide, and sexual abuse. There's also the Northwell Trauma Institute which helps coordinate and build trauma programs across the entire health system. It's the centerpiece that brings much of our trauma efforts together.

## How important is it for you to be a part of an organization that takes on big issues like gun violence prevention?

I can't tell you how thrilled I am that Northwell Health has taken this on under Michael Dowling's visionary leadership. This is the first time that a prominent healthcare industry leader has really taken a stance on this issue and it's already starting to make waves. There are many physicians and medical professionals who have taken a stance on this issue, but it can be very difficult to mobilize a health system or hospitals from the bottom up. By having a health system leader who is taking on this tremendously important issue, it has the potential to make real change across the health system and beyond. Mr. Dowling's passion toward gun violence prevention has empowered us on the front lines to engage in this debate and elevate the importance of gun safety.

## What is the mission for the Center for Gun Violence Prevention?

Our mission is to treat gun violence as a public health crisis. We want to focus on a few key areas that we can tackle as a healthcare system to enhance gun safety within our community and to serve as an example nationally for what a health system can do to prevent gun violence. Some of the areas we

will focus on include education, screening, community engagement, advocacy and research. With respect to education, we will educate physicians, residents, medical students and all healthcare providers about gun safety counseling and screening. We're also looking to educate our patients and their families on issues such as safe gun storage and firearm injury prevention strategies. We hope to integrate questions related to firearms within our electronic health system which will not only enhance our screening efforts, but also allow us to perform firearm-related research which is sorely lacking nationally. By taking this approach and viewing gun violence as a public health issue, we can research it accordingly and identify some of the root causes. When it comes to advocacy, we're fortunate to have Mr. Dowling's leadership as his voice will continue to mobilize other health industry leaders nationally and gives us all a unique platform to make real change.

## How important is it to engage other industry leaders in order to drive change and make a real difference on this issue?

Reaching out to other industry leaders is critical in order to make a meaningful impact on gun violence prevention. As I mentioned earlier, there is only so much mobilization that we can do from the front lines, but having a healthcare leader like Mr. Dowling take a stance and speak so passionately about gun violence inspires other health systems and industry leaders to rise to the challenge. We have already had a number of other industry leaders step up to the challenge and that will only continue to grow with time. I truly believe this is a one-of-kind opportunity to mobilize the whole healthcare industry and private sector in a way that has not been done before.

Our goal is to build a blueprint for how health systems across the nation can reduce gun violence and promote gun safety. Currently that doesn't exist. If we can develop a successful gun violence prevention strategy internally, it will serve as an example for other health systems and industries to follow suit. We want to lead the charge on this and show others that meaningful change is possible and that lives can be saved. If we can engage other health systems one by one across the country to adopt something similar to what we develop, we are one step closer to reducing gun violence. ●