December supplement

The US National Violent Death Reporting System

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Accompanying this issue is a supplement describing the National Violent Death Reporting System established by the Centers for Disease Control in the US. This is welcome news because any such reporting system enhances our ability to prevent injuries. As the papers in the supplement well illustrate, the data are already being put to good use.

The National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) links and consolidates data about violent deaths (suicides, homicides, deaths of undetermined intent, deaths by legal intervention, and unintentional firearm discharge deaths) from 17 participating US states. The data are obtained from various sources (death certificates, coroner/medical examiner reports, police reports, toxicology reports, crime lab reports, and others), yielding a comprehensive view of violent deaths.

The supplement showcases this system, with topics covering research, policy, and

future directions. Some of the broad areas addressed include homicide and suicide rates, law enforcement, sex differences, and poisoning. Other topics include studies of linked suicide-homicide events, homicides of children, the relationship between violent death and gender, classification of deaths as being of "undetermined intent", and mental illness and drug use among suicides victims. In addition, there are discussions of practical applications of NVDRS data, such as reducing suicides and fatal poisonings and improving partnerships with law enforcement. Several papers address

methodologic issues related to the NVDRS.

It should be clear to readers that although this is a US initiative, many of the lessons apply to other countries. Violent or intentional deaths—homicide and suicide—tend to be the neglected twins when we think of injury prevention. The NVDRS goes a long way to redressing the balance. The need for a comprehensive system for studying violent deaths is not limited to the US and this supplement considers how similar systems could be implemented in other countries.

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