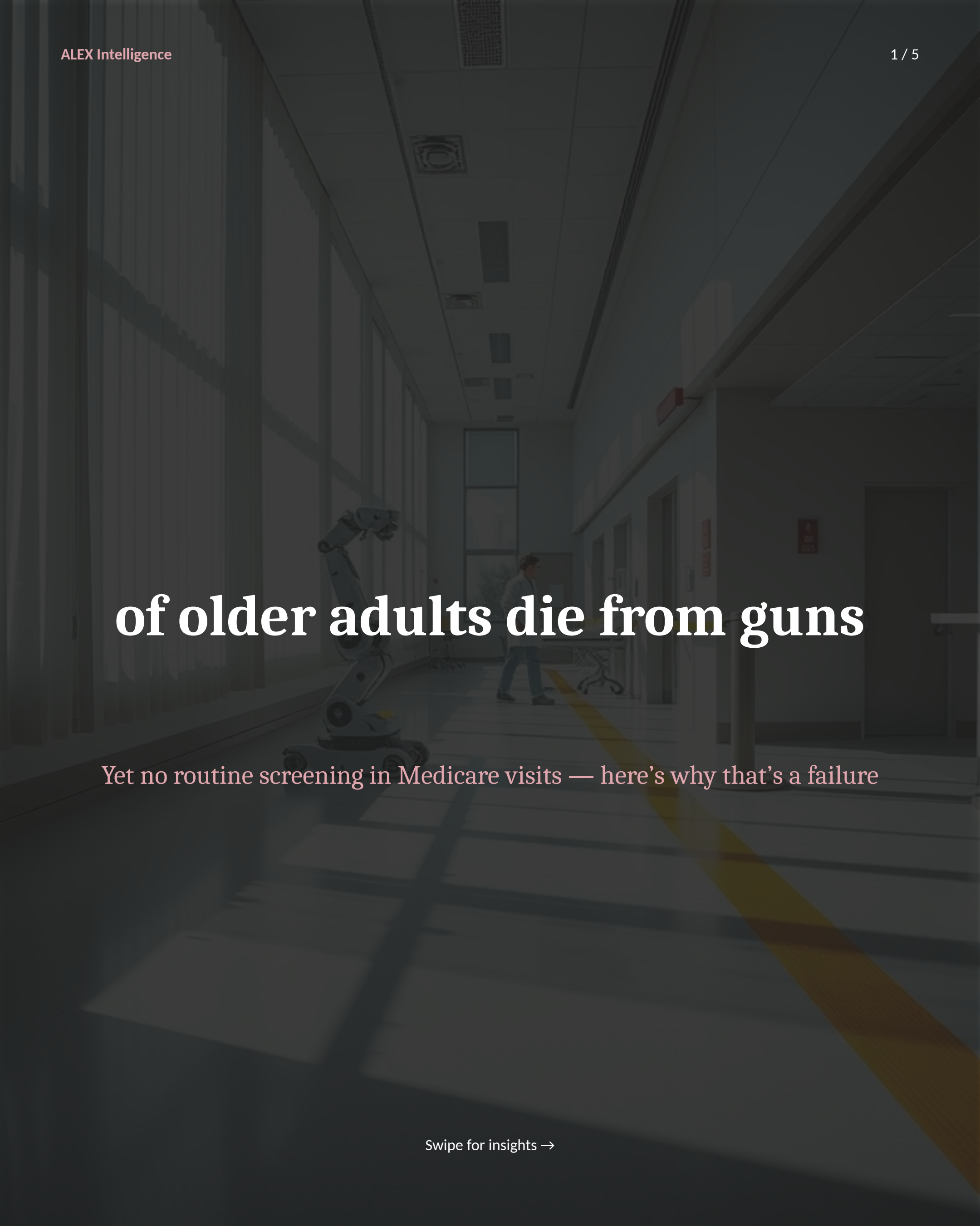


# of older adults die from guns

Yet no routine screening in Medicare visits — here’s why that’s a failure

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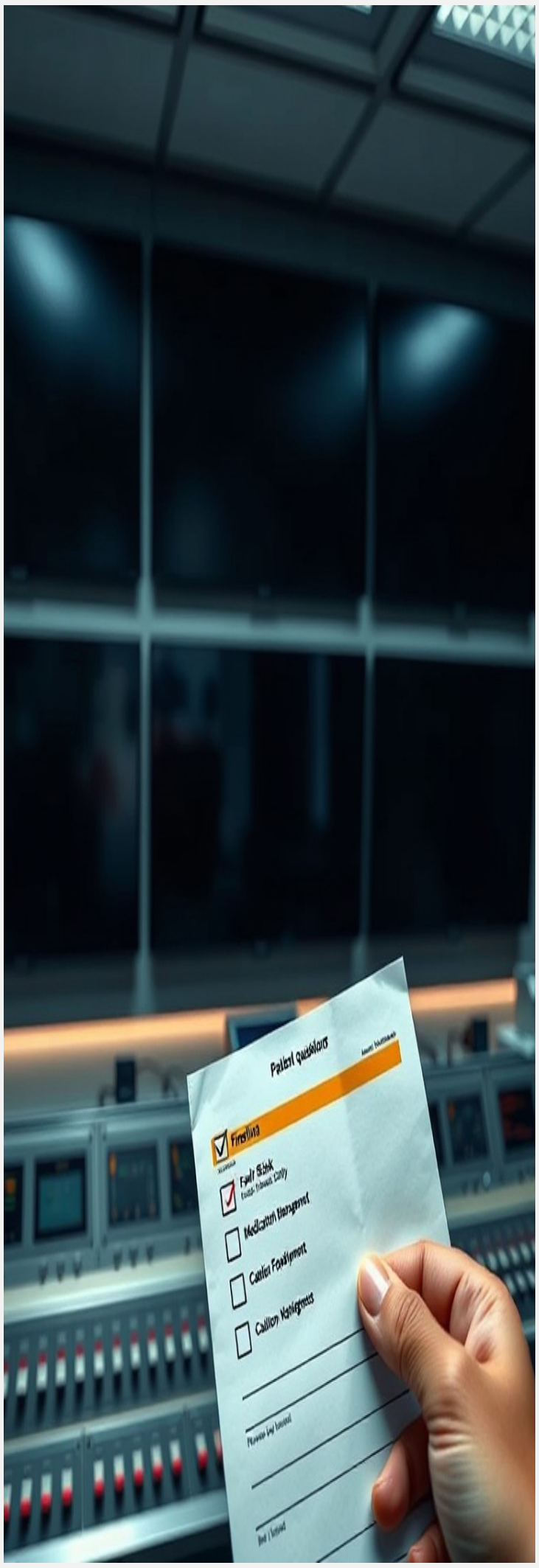
THE DATA

21

Daily firearm deaths in older adults

An average of 21 adults aged 65+ die from firearms-related injuries each day in the U.S.

This figure, drawn from a recent commentary in the New England Journal of Medicine, underscores a critical gap in preventive care. While pediatricians routinely screen for firearm safety, no such standard exists for older patients — despite the fact that over 90% of these deaths are suicides. The absence of a protocol in Medicare's annual wellness visit means high-risk individuals are not being proactively assessed.



Source: University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus · Published November 17, 2026
https://news.cuanschutz.edu/emergency-medicine/betz-firearms-safety-older-patients

01

Safety is a function of cognitive decline

The article reveals that cognitive decline, vision loss, and depression — all common in aging — heighten the risk of firearm injury. Yet only 5% of caregivers of dementia patients report being counseled about gun safety, despite 30% of dementia patients having access to firearms. This reveals a systemic failure: medical providers are not equipped to assess risk at the intersection of aging and access, even when the evidence is clear.

02

Ethics of omission in healthcare

The absence of firearm safety in geriatric care isn't just a gap — it's an ethical blind spot. By excluding firearm risk from routine conversations, providers are implicitly accepting preventable harm. The commentary argues that framing firearms as a home safety issue — like fall risk or medication management — normalizes the discussion without judgment. This reframing is not about restriction; it’s about patient-centered care in the face of changing risk profiles.

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