Improve Quality and Inclusive Care for LGBTQ+ Patients

TIPS TO HELP UNDERSTAND AND ELIMINATE HEALTH DISPARITIES

Fifteen percent of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning or queer (LGBTQ+) Americans report postponing or avoiding medical treatment due to discrimination, including nearly 3 in 10 transgender individuals, according to a 2020 Center for American Progress survey.[1]

This survey, among other studies, directly shows stigma, discrimination, harassment and hate leading to the discomfort and mistrust many LGBTQ+ individuals experience.

Help improve the care experience and health outcomes for LBGTQ+ patients by promoting an environment that is sensitive to their needs.

Collect sexual orientation and gender identity data to identify needs

To better understand the needs and improve care for LGBTQ+ patients, collect sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) data.

Example: You have a transgender male patient with a uterus. He would need cervical screening for preventive care.

In this and other examples, collecting SOGI data can:

- **Show awareness and sensitivity** of the patient's needs.
- **Help you learn about your patients** and make the proper referrals for preventive screening and testing.
- **Help improve your communication** with the patient.
- **Enhance the patient's experience**, create a safe and welcoming environment, and improve quality of care to LGBTQ+ patients.
- **Help identify the need for training** to increase awareness among providers and clinic staff.

For more information and resources on SOGI data collection, refer to the National LGBTQIA+ Health Education Center at www.lgbtqiahealtheducation.org/resources/in/collecting-sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-data/.

A few key terms and definitions used by LGBTQ+ community[2]

We urge you and your health care team to learn more about LGBTQ+ terms to improve communication and quality care. Note, this is a short list of common terms used in the LGBTQ+ community. It does not contain all LGBTQ+ terms.

- **Gender identity** – A person's inner sense of being either a girl/woman/female, a boy/man/male, something else, or having no gender at all. This may or may not correspond with their gender assigned at birth.
- **Gender affirmation** – The process of making social, legal, and/or medical changes to recognize, accept, and express one's gender identity. For example, medical changes can include receiving gender-affirming hormones and/or surgeries. It is important to understand, however, medical changes are not the only way to affirm gender identity. Although this process is sometimes referred to as transition, the term gender affirmation is recommended.
- **Gender expression** – This term describes the ways in which a person expresses their gender to the world. It can be through their clothing, speech, behavior, etc. (e.g. feminine, masculine, and androgynous). Gender expression is fluid and is separate from the assigned sex at birth or gender identity.

Ask patients for their pronouns

When establishing relationships with your LGBTQ+ patients, be sensitive to the patient's gender identity. Ask what pronouns your patient would like to use. By asking, you are showing that you care and respect them.

Use the gender pronouns list below to help guide you. Note, these are not the only pronouns used.

Gender pronouns				
Subjective	Objective	Possessive	Reflexive	Example
She	Her	Hers	Herself	She is speaking. I listened to her. The backpack is hers.
He	Him	His	Himself	He is speaking. I listened to him. The backpack is his.
They	Them	Theirs	Themself	They are speaking. I listened to them. The backpack is theirs.
Ze	Hir/Zir	Hirs/Zirs	Hirself/Zirself	Ze is speaking. I listened to hir. The backpack is zirs.

Source: Trans Student Educational Resource[3]

Provide a welcoming environment and positive experience for LGBTQ+ patients[4]

Use the following tips to help build an environment that is overall safe and welcoming for your LGBTQ+ patients.

- **Add gender identity, gender expression and other LGBTQ+ terminology** to patient intake forms and employment non-discrimination policies.

- **Post unisex bathroom signs.** Use signs that allow all people to use restrooms that best align with their gender identity.

- **Post non-discrimination statements in visible areas,** such as the waiting room, website, patient rooms and other areas of the clinic.

- **Check all materials and images.** If appropriate, include LGBTQ+ symbols, diverse gender expressions, same-gender couples and LGBTQ+ families.

- **Make visible and acknowledge national observances in your practice,** such as Pride Month and National Transgender Day of Remembrance.

- **Ensure conversations remain confidential**, as some youth may share their LGBTQ+ identity with their healthcare provider. Recognize that many youth may hold an LGBTQ+ identity and not share with a parent or guardian who may be present at the medical appointment.[5]

- **Train staff at all levels on gender affirming communication and care.** The National LGBTQIA+ Health Education Center offers free and low cost training: www.lgbtqiahealtheducation.org.

References:

[1]Centers for American Progress. The State of the LGBTQ Community in 2020. www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbtq-rights/reports/2020/10/06/491052/state-lgbtq-community-2020/.

[2]National LGBT Health Education Center. (2020). LGBTQIA+ Glossary of Terms for Health Care Teams. Retrieved from www.lgbtqiahealtheducation.org/publication/lgbtqia-glossary-of-terms-for-health-care-teams.

[3]Trans Student Educational Resource. (n.d.). Gender Pronouns. Retrieved from www.transstudent.org/graphics/pronouns101.

[4]National LGBTQIA+ Health Education Center – A Program of the Fenway Institute. (2021). Ten Strategies for Creating Inclusive Health Care Environments for LGBTQIA+ People.

[5]American Academy of Pediatrics. (2021). A Pediatrician's Guide to an LGBTQ+ Friendly Practice. Retrieved from www.aap.org/en/patient-care/lgbtq-health-and-wellness/a-pediatricians-guide-to-an-lgbtq-friendly-practice/.