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ENHANCING THE CARE SETTING

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Creating a Welcoming Environment for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, & Transgender (LGBT) Patients⁶⁸

The Physical Environment

LGBT patients often scan an office to help them determine what information they feel comfortable sharing with their health-care provider. Consider implementing some of the following strategies as appropriate for the type and location of your office:

- Include relevant information for LGBT patients in brochures, educational materials, and trainings.
- Post a rainbow flag, pink triangle, or other LGBT-friendly symbols or stickers.
- Exhibit posters showing diverse same-sex couples or transgender people, or posters from nonprofit LGBT or HIV/AIDS organizations.
- Display brochures (multilingual when possible and appropriate) about LGBT health concerns.
- Disseminate or visibly post a non-discrimination statement that equal care will be provided to all patients, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, physical ability or attributes, religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity/expression.
- Acknowledge relevant days of observance in your practice such as World AIDS Day, LGBT Pride Day, and National Transgender Day of Remembrance.
- Display LGBT-specific media, including local or national magazines or newsletters about and for LGBT and HIV-positive individuals.
- Designate a universal gender-inclusive “Restroom” with unisex signs.
- Display a confidentiality statement prominently and provide it in writing to every patient.

Intake Forms

Filling out the intake forms gives patients one of their first and most important impressions of your office. The experience sets the tone for how comfortable a patient feels being open about their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

Suggestions for adapting intake forms include the following:

- Change the term “marital status” to “relationship status” and add “partner” wherever the word “spouse” is used.
- Add “male to female” and “female to male” transgender options to the male/female check boxes on your intake form.

On the following page are a few sample questions to include as part of your intake form or when taking an oral history as part of a comprehensive intake.

⁶⁸ Excerpted with permission from “Guidelines for Care of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Patients,” created by the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association (GLMA). May 2005.
www.glma.org/data/n_0001/resources/live/welcoming%20environment.pdf

Sample Questions for a LGBT-Friendly Intake Form

Legal name:

Name I prefer to be called (if different):

Preferred pronoun?

- She
- He

What is your sex or current gender?

(Check all that apply)

- Male
- Female
- TransMale/Transman
- TransFemale/Transwoman
- Genderqueer
- Additional category
(Please Specify): _____
- Decline to state

What sex were you assigned at birth?

- Male
- Female
- Decline to state

Are your current partners:

- Men
- Women
- Both

In the past, have your sexual partners been:

- Men
- Women
- Both

Current relationship status: (An alternative is to leave a blank line next to relationship status)

- Single
- Married
- Domestic Partnership/Civil Union
- Partnered
- Involved with multiple partners
- Separated from spouse/partner
- Divorced/permanently separated from spouse/partner
- Other (leave space for patient to fill in)

Living situation:

- Live alone
- Live with spouse or partner
- Live with roommate(s)
- Live with parents or other family members
- Other (leave space for patient to fill in)

Children in home:

- No children in home
- My own children live with me/us
- My spouse or partner's children live with me/us
- Shared custody with ex-spouse or partner

Sexual Orientation Identity:

- Bisexual
- Gay
- Heterosexual/Straight
- Lesbian
- Queer
- Not Sure
- Don't Know
- Other (state "please feel free to explain" and leave a blank space to fill in)

More sample questions available at glma.org/ and the Center of Excellence for Transgender Health at transhealth.ucsf.edu/trans?page=lib-data-collection.

Language

Listen to your patients and how they describe their own sexual orientation, partner(s), and relationship(s), and reflect their choice of language. Be aware that although many LGBT people may use words such as “queer,” “dyke,” and “fag” to describe themselves, these and other words have been derogatory terms used against LGBT individuals and are not appropriate for use by healthcare providers.

Staff Sensitivity and Training

Training for all staff is critical to creating and maintaining a practice environment deemed safe for LGBT patients. Training should be periodic to address staff changes and keep all staff up-to-date.

- Designate an onsite LGBT resource person to answer any staff questions that arise.
- Make sure entire office staff is trained to use transgender patient’s preferred pronoun and name. Clearly indicate this information on their medical record and in a manner that allows you to easily reference it for future visits.
- Have indications and mechanisms for referral to LGBT-identified or LGBT-friendly providers.
- Make it clear to employees that discrimination against LGBT individuals will not be tolerated. Monitor compliance and provide a mechanism for patients to report any disrespectful behavior.

The Gay and Lesbian Medical Association (GLMA) has developed a [Cultural Competence Webinar Series](#)⁶⁹, which includes additional information about creating welcoming environments for LGBT patients.

⁶⁹ www.glma.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.viewPage&pageId=1025&grandparentID=534&parentID=940

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