

BARRIERS TO TRANSGENDER HEALTHCARE ACCESS



DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICES

A recent survey conducted by the National Center for Transgender Equality found that 33% of transgender participants had at least one negative experience while visiting a physician, such as being verbally harassed or refused treatment due to their gender identity. Many transgender people delay seeking out health services out of fear of facing discrimination for their gender identity, which sometimes results in transgender patients developing severe medical conditions.

SEX-BASED TREATMENT PLANS

In standard medical practice sex is often used to determine what medical conditions patients should be screened for, as well as what type and dosage of medication they should be prescribed. This poses a significant challenge in providing adequate care for transgender patients, as physicians tend to develop treatment plans based on the gender registered on the patient's insurance rather than their anatomy and physiology.



LACK OF TRAINING

Healthcare professionals often receive little to no instruction on how to care for transgender patients. As many providers do not consider the possibility that their patients are transgender or are unsure about how to initiate discussions surrounding gender identity, they may miss out on key information in regards the patient's transition-related medical history unless the patient brings up the subject themselves. They may feel uncomfortable disclosing their gender identity, however, or simply do not see the relevancy to their current health issue.

MAJOR KNOWLEDGE GAPS

Efforts to provide adequate healthcare to transgender individuals are hindered by a lack of research into transgender health. There are major knowledge gaps in virtually all medical fields in regards to transgender individuals, from their average life expectancy to the correct dosages of medication for various diseases. The lack of data on the transgender community also reinforces the myth that transgender people comprise only a small subset of the population and makes it difficult for researchers to secure funding for their work.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

1

ASK PATIENTS FOR THEIR PREFERRED NAME AND PRONOUNS

It is always a good practice to ask new patients what name and pronouns they would like to be referred to by. When asking patients directly healthcare providers should be sure to do so in a discrete and respectful manner as to not "out" them or cause them discomfort.

2

NORMALIZE USING GENDER-NEUTRAL TERMS

As a rule of thumb it is best not assume a person's gender based on their behavior or appearance. When referring to a patient whose gender you are unsure of, providers should either use gender-neutral pronouns or avoid gendered terms altogether.

3

AVOID ASKING UNNECESSARY QUESTIONS

Before asking a patient a question related to their gender identity, ask yourself whether such information is necessary in order to provide the best care possible to the patient. If so, make sure to explain to the patient why the requested information is relevant to their current health concerns and reassure them that anything said will remain confidential.

4

ACKNOWLEDGE WHEN MISTAKES ARE MADE

It's natural to have difficulty getting accustomed to using preferred names and pronouns at first. In the event that you misgender a patient or call them by the wrong name by accident, make sure to apologize for the mistake but do not dwell on it, as that may cause additional discomfort to the patient.

5

STAY INFORMED

It is vital to stay up to date with research on transgender medicine as little is currently known about how best to provide care for transgender patients. Moreover, language regarding gender identity is constantly changing, so providers should be careful not to offend transgender patients by referring to them with outdated terminology. Providers should consult sources that focus specifically on transgender health or partner closely with the transgender community, such as the National Center for Transgender Equality or the Center of Excellence for Transgender Health.

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