

Tips to Approach Cancer Screening in Sexual and Gender Minority Patients

According to the recently released Gallop Poll, the number of people who are LGBTQ+ in the United States has grown to just over 7% of the adult population, with an even greater percentage specifically in Gen Z; yet health care, as a whole, is not designed to equitably provide care to this population. Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) questions help inform care by serving as a starting point for clinician-patient discussions about the medical care needs of patients that may otherwise be missed when assumptions are made about a person's gender or sexual orientation. This is especially true when it comes to cancer screenings, where gender and cancer have been deeply intertwined and reinforced through gendered language and practice environments. Unfortunately, many institutions do not ask, and many clinicians are unaware if their institutions ask, SOGI questions, leading

to concerns of whether the information, if collected, is even used to inform care. In addition to the social, economic, and systemic health care barriers that SGM people face, referring to breast, cervical, ovarian, and uterine cancers as women's cancers creates additional barriers to access and care for transgender men and non-binary people. Similarly, connecting prostate cancer to men's cancer creates barriers to access and care for transgender women and non-binary people. Qualitative and quantitative data show that SGM people experience many challenges and barriers to equitable health care, including delays in care and increased cancer morbidity; much work is needed to improve the approach to care of SGM patients with hopes of not only providing equitable care, but also improving outcomes.



TIPS

On Approaching the Care of SGM Patients

Look for opportunities to make the practice environment welcoming and inclusive of diverse genders and sexual orientations with respect to colors, furniture, staff attire, pictures, websites, patient education materials, restrooms, and signage

Look for opportunities to update and improve patient intake forms and patient modifiable online electronic health records to allow for diverse gender selection and, if possible, an anatomical inventory

Utilize patient pronouns and preferred name to affirm inclusion and acceptance

Seek buy-in and support from the organization's leadership and administration

Utilize an anatomical inventory, rather than assumptions based on gender or sex at birth, to determine appropriate cancer screening needs for patients

Train all staff on sensitivity during patient interactions, not just the clinical team, so that the patient experience improves from check-in to check-out

Model respect for all people

Additional Resources For Health Care Professionals to Learn More



1. The Whitman Walker Cultural Competency Toolkit

<https://whitmanwalkerimpact.org/cc-toolkit>

The Whitman Walker Organization is a community-centered enterprise committed to advancing social justice and equality through health. Their Toolkit, titled, “Transforming Healthcare: A Guide to Best Practices in LGBTQIA+ Cultural Competency Training,” presents recommended standards and best practices for training health care professionals (HCPs) and staff in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual/ace spectrum cultural competence. It reflects the expert consensus of leading educators, HCPs, academicians, researchers, and patient advocates.

2. National LGBTQIA+ Health Education Center

<https://www.lgbtqihealtheducation.org/resources/in/reproductive-health/>

The National LGBTQIA+ Health Education Center is part of the Division of Education and Training at The Fenway Institute, Fenway Health. The Fenway Institute (TFI) is an interdisciplinary center for research, training, education, and policy development that works to ensure access to quality, culturally affirming medical and mental health care for traditionally underserved communities, including LGBTQIA+ people and those affected by HIV/AIDS. TFI is housed within Fenway Health Community Health Center (Fenway Health) (founded in 1971), which is a Boston-based independent 501(c) (3), Federally Qualified Health Center serving over 30,000 patients in three practice sites. The Division of Education and Training was founded in 2005 to provide LGBTQIA+ competency education for health care organizations. Their initial project was to develop The Fenway Guide to LGBT Health, the first medical textbook focused on primary care for LGBTQIA+ people. The Education Center specializes in providing national training and technical assistance (T/TA) to health centers in order to optimize access to quality health care for LGBTQIA+ populations.



Resources

That Health Care Professionals can Recommend to Support Patients, Families, and Communities

1. National LGBT Cancer Network

<https://cancer-network.org/>

The National LGBT Cancer Network works to improve the lives of LGBT cancer survivors and those at risk by educating the LGBT community about the increased cancer risks and the importance of screening and early detection, training health care professionals to offer more culturally-competent, safe, and welcoming care, and advocating for LGBT survivors in mainstream cancer organizations, the media, and research.

2. GLSEN, Inc.

<https://www.glsen.org/>

Founded by a group of teachers in 1990, this organization has a network of 43 chapters in 30 states to ensure that LGBTQ students are able to learn and grow in a school environment that is safe and affirming by activating supportive educators, centering and uplifting student-led clubs, conducting extensive and original research to inform evidence-based solutions for K-12, and authoring developmentally appropriate resources for educators to use throughout their school community. More than 500,000 GLSEN resources are downloaded by students and educators each year.

3. The Trevor Project

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/>

The Trevor Project is the world's largest suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) young people providing 24/7 crisis support services. Text, chat, or call anytime to reach a trained counselor. This service is free and confidential. The Trevor Project is also involved in advocacy for policies and original research. The organization offers two training programs designed for youth-serving professionals, which offer tools to help prevent suicide amongst LGBTQ young people.

4. Trans Lifeline

<https://translifeline.org/>

Trans Lifeline is run by and for trans people with a goal to provide trans peer support and care for this community. The organization operates as a hotline and microgrants 501(c)(3) non-profit organization offering direct emotional and financial support to trans people in crisis – for the trans community, by the trans community. The Family & Friends Line provides peer support for friends, partners, family members, and professionals supporting trans loved ones and community members. Trans Lifeline trusts trans people as the experts in their own lives, and they resource trans people's support networks to do the same.

5. American Trans Resource Hub (ATRH)

<https://www.atrh.org/>

The transition process should be understanding and smooth but, in many states, it is anything but that. American Trans Resource Hub brings transgender individual's comfort and stability to the transition process by tackling any issues that arise, such as housing and employment.

6. Gender Spectrum

<https://genderspectrum.org/articles/gender-spectrum-groups>

Gender Spectrum works to create gender sensitive and inclusive environments for all children and teens. Families have the first and greatest impact on children, so connections with families are central to their work. Gender Spectrum provides a wealth of online programs, resources, and information that young people, parents, and families can use to further their understanding of gender and learn the value of parental and adult support. They also work with professionals, including educators, social service workers, faith leaders, medical and mental health professionals, government and business leaders, and others who need support in navigating rapidly changing gender understandings. Their professional development and training services help them achieve their objectives and discover an appreciation of the place gender has in everyone's life.