

Patient/Resident-Centered Strategies for the Transgender Population

Lesson 1: Objectives

At the completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Define identity terminology;
- Understand the disparities and challenges faced by the transgender population; and
- Discuss strategies to enhance the transgender patient's/resident's health care experience.

Introduction

In the United States, of people aged 18 and over, a total of 0.5% of the population or 1.3 million adults, identify as transgender. In the United States, of people aged 13-17, a total of 1.4% of the population or 300,000 youth, identify as transgender. The term transgender has varying definitions across cultures and communities. Today, it is used most often as an umbrella term for individuals whose gender identity is different from sex assigned at birth, or individuals whose gender expression is different from social norms.

People who identify as transgender may experience stigma and discrimination in their day-to-day lives. They may delay seeking medical care because of fear or actual experiences of negative treatment by health care staff.

All members of the health care team play a role in improving communication and creating an inclusive environment that respects and responds to the unique needs and concerns of transgender people.

Lesson 2: Identity Terminology

Sex assigned at birth is largely based on external genitalia, however a person's sex is a combination of internal reproductive organs, external genitalia, chromosomes, and hormones. Sex assigned at birth is typically assumed to be male or female, however a person may be assigned intersex when internal reproductive organs, external genitalia, chromosomes, or hormone receptors are different from standard male or female development. A person's gender identity refers to the internal sense of being a man or male, woman or female, both, neither, or another gender. People are categorized as cisgender when their gender identity aligns with sex assigned at birth. People are categorized as transgender when their gender identity does not align with sex assigned at birth.

While people use many different terms to describe themselves, in general, someone who was assigned male at birth, but has a female gender identity is a transgender

woman, and someone who was assigned female at birth but has a male gender identity is a transgender man.

There are a variety of other gender expansive terms that people may use to define their gender identity, or forms of expression, that are outside of male and female, or masculine and feminine. These include but are not limited to non-binary, genderqueer, gender variant, and gender fluid. A person may identify as agender if they do not have a sense of gender.

Gender expression is the way a person acts, dresses, speaks, and behaves. The way a person expresses their gender may not necessarily align with sex assigned at birth or gender identity.

Gender nonconforming is a term that has been used to describe a person whose gender expression differs from a given society's norms for males and females. People tend to dislike this term as it suggests there is something wrong with them since they do not "conform".

Sexual orientation relates to romantic, affectionate, and sexual attraction to others. It is distinct from gender identity. Transgender people may have any sexual orientation regardless of their gender identity.

Transgender people, after coming to recognize and accept one's gender identity, may seek to begin what is referred to as a transition process. Each person's transition process will look different. Most often, this is the period where a person undergoes social, legal, and/or medical interventions to align their outward appearance with their sense of self. In a social transition, a person may modify clothing, hairstyles, and mannerisms along with using a new name. For individuals that seek medical transition this includes beginning administration of hormone therapy and/or surgeries to alter physical characteristics. Someone who is transgender may also identify with pronouns that match their gender identity, along with changing one's name. Female pronouns include She, Her, and Hers, Male pronouns include He, Him, and His, and Indefinite pronouns for people who do not identify as Male or Female include They, Them and Theirs. There are other pronouns that people may use, so be mindful of what they share in-person or disclose via forms and other documentation.

The term transsexual means to "cross sex" and has been used in past medical literature to describe those who transition their sex through medical interventions. While some literature suggests the word transsexual is outdated or derogatory, within a subset of the community it has great meaning and importance. Members of the health care team shouldn't use the term unless someone specifically asks to be referred to this way.

To be respectful of the nuances surrounding identity and language, it is advised that all members of the health care team be sensitive to how a person describes themselves and their identity. Mirror the language the individual uses.

Quiz Question:

Match the identity term to its definition:

Gender identity - ***The internal sense of being a man or male, woman or female, both, neither, or another gender**

Cisgender – ***A person whose gender identity aligns with sex assigned at birth**

Transgender – ***A person whose gender identity does not align with sex assigned at birth**

Agender – ***A person who does not have a sense of gender**

Gender expression - ***The way a person acts, dresses, speaks, and behaves**

Lesson 3: Disparities and Challenges Faced by the Transgender Population

Studies indicate that transgender individuals experience multiple health disparities due to stigma, discrimination, and unique barriers to accessing quality care. By understanding the difficulties transgender people face, members of the health care team can help break down these barriers.

Most transgender individuals experience various forms of harassment, victimization, and discrimination in their daily lives. Seventy-seven percent experience mistreatment at school; forty-eight percent are physically attacked, verbally harassed, or denied equal treatment; and thirty percent experience mistreatment at work. Transgender individuals are more likely than the general population to be homeless, unemployed or underemployed, and living below the federal poverty level.

Disparities can create a great burden on the mental and physical health of transgender individuals. People who are transgender experience higher rates of several health concerns, including HIV infection, substance use and mental health disorders, targeted violence, and victimization.

Due to expectations of discrimination, disrespect, misunderstanding, or refusal of care in medical settings, many people who are transgender avoid or delay seeing a health care provider. Instead, they may seek guidance through the Internet, friends, and/or other nonmedical individuals. They may take nonprescription and potentially dangerous hormones and/or receive unsafe silicone injections and/or implants which can lead to illness and injury. When a person who is transgender seeks access to professional care, they typically have difficulty finding a provider who has expertise in patient/resident-centered transgender care. In a national survey, half of respondents reported having to teach their health care provider about transgender care.

Many people who are transgender lack health insurance, have been denied insurance coverage of transition-related care, or denied coverage of preventive care that is

inconsistent with the gender their insurer has listed. Health insurance plans are not required to cover transition-related care, although some states have made this a requirement. In a national survey, almost half of respondents postponed seeking care when sick or injured due to their inability to afford it.

Quiz Question:

Due to expectations of discrimination, disrespect, misunderstanding, or refusal of care in medical settings, many people who are transgender avoid or delay seeing a health care provider. Instead, they may...(Select all that apply)

- a. ***Seek guidance through the Internet**
- b. ***Take nonprescription hormones**
- c. ***Receive unsafe silicone injections**

Lesson 4: How to Enhance the Transgender Individual's Health Care Experience

Health care organizations seeking to enhance transgender patients'/residents' experiences must improve communication and create an inclusive environment. This involves all members of the health care team and is based on the principles of being welcoming, responsive, accountable, reliable, and respectful.

An important step to creating an inclusive environment is through adjustments to paperwork and electronic health records which allows individuals the option to self-disclose the name they go by, gender identity, and pronouns. This information allows you to be sensitive to the unique concerns that transgender patients/residents have and validates the individual. People may change the way they describe themselves over time. Don't assume you know the person's gender identity or the sex they were assigned at birth just by looking at them.

Address individuals using the name they go by, which may be different from their legally given name. If a person shares pronouns with you, be mindful in using them. Using the wrong name or pronouns can cause embarrassment and confusion. Never refer to a person as "it." Do not use gender terms or pronouns with an individual whether in-person or over the phone until this information is known, or in conversation asking how they would like to be addressed. Continue to use the person's name they go by and pronouns, even when they are not present. This will help maintain respect for the individual and help other staff members learn the patient's/resident's current identity. Consider practicing the use of pronouns with colleagues and friends. Making changes to the way one addresses other people can be challenging.

If a situation occurs in which a person's registration forms, records, insurance, and/or identity documents have different names and genders and/or sexes listed, ask for clarification in a polite and straightforward way. Do not ask for the person's "real" name. This assumes that the name they go by is not real.

People are naturally curious about individuals who are transgender and their lives, which may sometimes lead to questions outside of direct care. These questions may feel invasive, prying, or insensitive, so it is important to be mindful of the information you are gathering and why. Only discuss an individual's transgender status in a private setting, and only with those who need to know to provide appropriate and sensitive care.

Creating a culture of accountability and respect requires everyone to work together. Always apologize for mistakes. Do not gossip or joke about people who are transgender. This is offensive and may hinder your ability to provide quality care.

Quiz Question:

Someone who is transgender may identify with pronouns that match their gender identity. Place the appropriate pronouns under the gender identity.

Female Pronouns	Male Pronouns	Indefinite Pronouns (for those who do not identify as Male or Female)
She	He	They
Her	Him	Them
Hers	His	Theirs

Lesson 5: Conclusion

(NOTE: You may wish to display contact information for the appropriate personnel to contact within your organization.)

Your organization is committed to serving people who are transgender like any other individual to meet their health care needs. If you have any questions, contact the appropriate personnel for guidance and assistance.