



Health Care Etiquette

APRIL HARTFORD

Transgender - One Person's Journey

In a large nationwide survey, 50% of transgender patients reported having to teach their clinicians about the care they needed.*

In another survey, almost 90% of transgender respondents said there are not enough medical personnel who are properly trained to care for them. 70% of transgender and gender-nonconforming respondents reported experiencing discrimination in healthcare settings.†

“The more a person's trans status is blamed for [their] unrelated health problems, the less likely they are to bring it up, even when it is relevant.” —writer Naith Payton

Healthcare professionals often telegraph discomfort treating trans patients, appearing flustered even when addressing conditions as common as bronchitis and toe fungus. This list of do's and don'ts is for primary care practitioners who may see trans patients for routine, non-trans-related issues.

Resources for practitioners and trans patients
These organizations have resources for both healthcare practitioners and trans patients:

- The World Professional Association for Transgender Health, WPATH.org
- The University of California, San Francisco's Center of Excellence for Transgender Health, transhealth.ucsf.edu
- The Gay and Lesbian Medical Association, GLMA.org
- The Human Rights Commission, HRC.org

definitions

Trans Broken Arm Syndrome - “When healthcare providers assume that all medical issues are a result of a person being trans. Everything—from mental health problems to, yes, broken arms.” —writer Naith Payton

*National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, “Injustice at Every Turn,” 2011.

†Lambda Legal, “When Health Care Isn't Caring: Lambda Legal's Survey on Discrimination Against LGBT People and People Living with HIV,” Feb. 4, 2010.

Do...

Do make your trans patients feel welcome. Treat them with respect, courtesy, and sensitivity.

Do listen closely to your trans patients' needs and use your critical thinking skills when figuring out their health problems. They are human, so their bodies work the same as cisgendered bodies do.

Do educate yourself on trans healthcare issues, such as hormones and their potential side effects, to demystify this factor. Pick the brains of your colleagues who work with trans patients.

Do educate yourself on trans social issues to increase your comfort level with trans patients and understand the risks they face. Ask a local trans group for resources, watch trans-positive movies, or read articles online.

Do be careful that you and your staff members use your trans patient's preferred pronouns and name, regardless of the gender and name listed on their identity

Don't...

Don't treat your patients as subhuman or a curiosity.

Don't let fear or intimidation take over.

Don't waste valuable clinical time grilling a patient on their gender status and hormone replacement therapy if they are presenting with an unrelated problem.

Don't ask your patients to educate you on trans issues; do look up the information you need online or ask your colleagues.

Don't refer common problems like toe fungus out to specialists; just because your patient is trans doesn't mean they need a specialist for every health concern. Treating them should be just like treating everybody else.