

# UVM ScholarWorks

## Resources for LGBTQ+ Patients

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# Resources for LGBTQ+ Patients

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**Many LGBTQ+ patients face issues when seeking care from their primary care providers as well as specialists. This could be due to lack of information that is taught during medical education as well as lack of information that is available to the public.**

**This project aims to provide helpful information for both physicians and patients that is relevant for the care of LGBTQ+ patients.**

**Although CT is thought of to be one of the friendliest states towards the LGBTQ+ population, research by GLSEN in 2019 found that people who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community experience a variety of hostile and discriminatory acts such as:**

- 68+% of LGBTQ+ students heard negative remarks about transgender people and about gender expression**
- 73% of LGBTQ+ students heard homophobic remarks**
- 91% of LGBTQ+ students heard the word “gay” used in a negative connotation**
- 15-20% experienced physical harassment due to their gender, gender expression or sexual orientation**
- 5-7% experienced physical assault due to their gender, gender expression or sexual orientation**
- 52-57% experienced physical harassment due to their gender, gender expression or sexual orientation**

**A study published to Academic Psychiatry in 2021 found that both medical students and physicians lack information and training to better care for LGBTQ+ patients.**

- 67% of medical students ranked their LGBTQ+ curriculum as “fair or worse”**
- 70%+ of medical students did not feel comfortable discussing gender affirming surgery and gender transitioning**
- Only about 50% of PCPs felt competent in providing LGBTQ+ care**

**Speaking with some community members who identified as part of the LGBTQ+ community, their primary care physicians did not have enough medical information to care for their needs.**

**“I asked my PCP for PrEP, and she didn’t know what it was. She referred me to infectious disease so they can decide whether to give me the medication”.**

**“My doctor didn’t know what I should do to start gender affirming care and didn’t know who to refer me to”.**

**They also said that while they don’t expect their PCPs to be experts on LGBTQ+ care, they would prefer if their PCPs knew some general topics that more heavily affect LGBTQ+ patients and where to send them if a referral is needed.**

**“I think it would be helpful if they had a handout or a list of resources that explain some topics such as STD prevention or mental health specialists that are specifically for those who identify as part of the community”.**

**“It would be nice if the office had a readily accessible list of providers that do gender affirming care”.**

**\* The two people interviewed did not wish to be identified due to safety concerns with the current rise in LGBTQ+ hate crimes**

## Sexual Health:

- **Use gender neutral terms when asking about sexual activity e.g. say “do you have a partner” instead of “do you have a boyfriend/girlfriends”**
- **Treat patients as individuals and not as numbers in a population e.g. don't assume a gay man is at higher risk of STDs without asking about sexual practices**
- **Asking all patients about gender identity and sexual orientation normalizes the question and makes patients more comfortable to talk about their sexual health**
- **Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same thing. Gender identity describes the gender a person identifies as (such as male, female, trans female, trans person, nonbinary, etc.), while sexual orientation describes the gender that a person would want to have sexual relations with (such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, etc.). It is important to ask about both and not have assumptions based on preconceived notions e.g. a person can identify as a trans man and be sexually attracted to men.**

## **PrEP:**

**Is a medication that provides protection against HIV transmission as pre-exposure prophylaxis. Apretude is approved as a shot that reduces HIV transmission through sex. Truvada and Descovy are approved as oral pills that reduce HIV transmission through sex, with Truvada being the only approved oral medication that reduces HIV transmission through injection drugs.**

**Many patients in the LGBTQ+ community, especially men who have sex with men, might ask for PrEP to reduce their chances of HIV infection. It is a relatively safe medication with abdominal side effects as well as headaches and fatigue, all of which usually subside over time.**

**Before starting PrEP, patients will need to have blood work to check kidney function and liver function and check for HIV and Hep B status. While a patient continues to take PrEP, the following blood work should be routinely checked: HIV test (every 3 months), Kidney function (every 6 months), STIs ( every 3-6 months) and pregnancy test when applicable (every 6 months).**

**It is important to advise patients on PrEP protecting against HIV infection ONLY, and that it does not protect against other STDs, as that is a common misconception which leads to lack of condom usage.**

## **Transgender Care/Gender Affirming Care:**

**It is important to build a relationship of trust with patients. Don't be surprised if it takes months to a few years of care before patients feel more comfortable discussing their gender identity and need for gender affirming care.**

**Gender affirming care varies by individual and is not the same even for people who have a similar gender identity. Some transgender patients might only want hormone therapy, while others might also want top surgery only, bottom surgery only or both. It is important to address each patient's needs individually and not make assumptions.**

**For a transgender patient's primary care needs, it is inappropriate to ask patients about what body parts they have unless it is relevant to their current visit, and it is important to provide an explanation before asking the question e.g. provide explanations about Pap smears before asking if a patient has a cervix.**

**Don't assume a patient's sexual orientation based on historic societal norms e.g. a transgender woman will not necessarily be sexually attracted to men. Asking patients about their sexual orientation makes patients more comfortable by letting them know you are not making assumptions and provides you with the information that you need.**

**Gender affirming care is a complex topic that usually involves multiple disciplines including social, behavioral, psychiatric, medical and surgical care. A patient might be looking for their primary care provider to be the one that coordinates their care across the different disciplines involved.**

The laws concerning gender affirming care vary by state, with some being more restrictive than others. In CT, health insurance can't deny gender affirming care solely based on excluding gender dysphoria from being a real medical condition.

**UConn Transgender Medicine Services**  
**Farmington, CT**  
**860-679-3245**

**Connecticut Children's (Gender Affirming Surgery)**  
**Hartford, CT**  
**860-545-9000**

**Circle Center Care (variety of LGBTQ+ care including mental and physical health)**  
**Norwalk, CT**  
**203-852-9525**

**DMHAS (Variety of mental health resources for LGBTQ+ patients)**  
**<https://portal.ct.gov/DMHAS/Programs-and-Services/Finding-Services/LGBT-Services>**

**Apex Community Care (HIV, Prevention, Harm Reduction & Behavioral Health)**  
**Danbury, CT**  
**203-778-2437**

**Apex Community Care (HIV, Prevention, Harm Reduction & Behavioral Health)**  
**Torrington, CT**  
**860-453-0888**

## References:

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2. **O'Leary, K.B., Kunkel, G.H. Restructuring LGBTQ Curriculum in Medical Schools. *Acad Psychiatry* 45, 487–490 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40596-021-01414-1>**
3. **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, June 3). *Prep*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved November 29, 2022, from <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/prep.html>**
4. **Boyle, P. (2022, April 12). *What is gender-affirming care? your questions answered*. AAMC. Retrieved November 29, 2022, from <https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/what-gender-affirming-care-your-questions-answered>**