Some Do's and Don'ts for working with LGBTQI+ Patients

DON'T...

Make assumptions about someone's gender identity or sexual orientation.

DO...

Use gender neutral language and inclusive language to open the door to all patients.

Inclusive language:

- *Use the term "partner" or "significant other" instead of "boyfriend/girlfriend", or "husband/wife"*
- *Ask "are you seeing someone?" or "are you in a committed relationship?" instead of "do you have a girlfriend/boyfriend?" or "are you married?"*

Gender Neutral language:

- *Instead of "She is going to go to the doctor tomorrow" say "They are going to go to the doctor tomorrow" or "Sarah is going to go to the doctor tomorrow".*
- *Instead of "He has to pick up his prescription by the end of the week" say "They have to pick up the prescription by the end of the week" or "Sam has to pick up the prescription by the end of the week"*

DON'T...

Ask invasive questions about someone's body.

DO...

Respect people's identity.

If a patient identifies themselves as a woman, then they are a woman. If a patient identifies as a man, then they are a man. To ask someone "how far they have transitioned" or questions about their body <u>without a valid medical reason</u> is inappropriate. To be open to all transgender patients, you must be willing to accept and respect the individual's identity. Not everyone chooses to undergo medical transition or has access to the resources needed to undergo medical transition. To require someone to undergo medical procedures to conform to a certain body type is not empowering and is not inclusive of the diversity of people that are a part of the transgender community.

DON'T...

Out (reveal) someone's sexual orientation or transgender status to anyone – that is their decision only.

DO...

Talk to the person before advocating on their behalf.

Outing an LGBTQI+ patient to other staff, patients, or service providers without the patient's consent is not empowering. It is important to never take away a person's choices and make decisions for them. Instead, have a conversation with the patient and ask them if they want you to inform others about their sexual orientation or gender identity. If the person does not feel safe disclosing this information, then respect their wishes. Instead, implement clinical guidelines to let everyone know that all patients are welcome, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

DON'T...

Use the wrong pronouns to address a patient.

DO...

Use the pronoun that someone asks you to use. When you mess up a pronoun, correct yourself, apologize, and move on.

A patient might ask you to use feminine pronouns (she/her), masculine pronoun (he/him), neutral pronoun (they/them), or others to address them. Respect their wishes and accept that you may mess up. If you mess up, keep your apology brief so that it doesn't become about you and your mistake. If you are corrected by someone else, try not to be defensive.

DON'T...

Ignore when others use incorrect pronouns.

DO...

Model the correct pronoun usage.

When a colleague uses the wrong pronouns when talking about a patient, just continue the conversation and slip in a sentence that uses the correct pronoun.

i.e. Jo uses feminine pronouns (she, her).
A nurse says to you, "Jo needs to pick up <u>his</u> medication at the local pharmacy before the appointment".
You respond "ok, I can make sure that <u>she</u> gets to the pharmacy before the appointment".

Note: It is always a good idea to make sure that the person you are working with is out about their gender before correcting someone's pronoun. There may be instances when an individual may choose not to be out. Someone may make this decision for safety reasons, because they are afraid that they will lose access to the service, or because they simply don't want to deal with explaining their gender identity to another person.

DON'T...

Use language like, "I am working with a woman, who is really a man", "She says she's a man but she is <u>obviously</u> a woman", or "He is not a 'real woman'".

DO...

Respect an individual's identity and use the terms that someone uses for themselves. Mirror a person's language.

If you are trying to create a safe and welcoming environment for transgender patients, then do not use language like "real woman" and "real man". Respecting someone's identity quite simply means using the language that a person uses for themselves without judgment and mirroring their language back to them. If an individual identifies themselves as woman, then they are a woman. If an individual identifies as a man, then they are a man.

DO...

- **Speak up when someone makes homo/bi/transphobic or heterosexist remarks.**
- **Be aware of your own biases.**
- **Remember: Treat people as individuals and don't expect a single person to represent an entire community.**