

10 Tips for Improving Services for Trans People

1. Always respect a trans persons chosen pronoun.

This may be in the form of “he” or “she”, but might also include gender neutral pronouns such as “ze” or “they”. Do not worry if you make a mistake when referring to someone, it happens and can be rectified by an apology and a commitment to try harder to get it right. Using correct pronouns promotes a professional atmosphere of respect and understanding.

2. Welcome trans people by promoting your services and displaying trans positive material in your department/ward.

There are a range of LGBT newspapers, internet sites and magazines you can promote your services in, and you can also display LGBT or trans specific literature and posters to help demonstrate you are trans-friendly. Think about using gender neutral signs for toilets.

3. Treat trans individuals with dignity and respect.

You can show respect by being relaxed and courteous, avoiding negative facial reactions, and by speaking to trans people as you would any other patient or service user. Don't make assumptions about people by their appearance.

4. If you are unsure about a person's gender identity, or how they wish to be addressed, ask.

If you let the person know that you are only trying to be respectful, your question will usually be appreciated. For instance, you can ask, “What are your preferred pronouns?” or “What name would you like to be called?” In order to facilitate a good provider-patient relationship, it is important not to make assumptions about the identity, beliefs, concerns, or sexual orientation of transgender and gender non-conforming patients.

5. Establish an effective policy for addressing discriminatory comments and behaviour in your department.

Ensure staff are fully aware of their obligations and procedures as stated in the Equality, Diversity and Human Rights and Dignity at Work policies, and that they are up-to-date with any training that is being offered.

6. Remember to keep the focus on care rather than indulging in questions out of curiosity.

In most healthcare situations, people's assigned sex at birth is irrelevant, although there are a few exceptions. Asking inappropriate questions about a person's

assignment at birth is invasive and potentially very hurtful. You do not need to know what a person's primary or secondary characteristics are in order to place them in the appropriate area in your ward, for example. If you are not sure, ask the person themselves and respect their choices.

7. Remember that the presence of a trans person in your ward/department is not always a “training opportunity” for other staff.

Many trans people have had hospital staff call in others to observe their bodies and the interactions between a patient and healthcare provider, often out of an impulse to train junior staff. However, like in other situations where a patient has a rare or unusual finding, asking a patient's permission is a necessary first step before inviting in a colleague or trainee. Many transgender patients wish to maintain control over who sees them unclothed. Therefore, when patients are observed without first asking their permission, it can quickly feel like an invasion of privacy and creates a barrier to respectful, competent health care.

8. It is inappropriate to ask trans patients about their genitals if it is unrelated to their care.

A person's genital status - whether one has had any lower surgery or not—does not determine that person's gender identity for the purposes of social behaviour, service provision, or legal status. Remember that trans people might be very highly sensitive about that area of their body. Trans women may not want to use a bottle and trans men might not want to use a slipper pan for example.

9. Never disclose a person's trans status or gender identity history to anyone who does not explicitly need the information for care.

Just as you would not needlessly disclose a person's HIV status, a person's gender identity is not an item for gossip. Having it known that one is trans can result in ridicule and possible violence towards that individual. If disclosure is relevant to care, use discretion and inform the patient whenever possible.

10. Become knowledgeable about trans healthcare issues.

Get training, stay up to date on trans issues, and know where to access resources.

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