

Teaching How to Care for Trans/Gender Non-Conforming Patients: It Is Easier Than You Think

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Abstract:

This study demonstrates the importance of an hour lecture and patient panel in arming medical professionals with the communication skills necessary for serving transgender and gender non-conforming patients. While many programs may teach the medical side of transitioning, a well-documented barrier for trans/gender non-conforming patients arises from communication: using incorrect pronouns, gendered language, and lack of practitioner exposure. All medical professionals must be equipped in order to address this barrier, since trans/gender non-conforming patients require care from every specialty and can face often unintentional prejudiced language when seeking care.

In an effort to equip students with the necessary communication skills, 41 physician assistant students attended a one-hour lecture followed by an hour patient panel. The lecture reviewed

bias, the difference between sex, gender, gender expression, and sexual identity as well as terms that can be used in place of gendered language and other ways to create a safe, comfortable clinical environment for all patients. The patient panel had one person identifying as gender non-conforming and a transwoman. Students completed a survey the week before and immediately following the lecture evaluating their comfort and knowledge communicating with trans/gender non-conforming patients. The surveys found a statistically significant difference in student understanding and comfort around barriers to care, inclusive language, educating other healthcare practitioners, and the differences between sex and gender.

This project shows that students need education surrounding communication with transgender and gender non-conforming patients and that a two-hour lecture and patient panel can increase student competency and confidence. Future directions include extending this study to other student groups and residents.