

The Daily Targum

NEWS

Medical student creates app for improving transgender individuals' experience with health care

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Photo by Rutgers.edu

Taylor Chiang, a second-year student at the Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, wanted to create the application TranZap to address barriers for transgender individuals to high-quality, inclusive health care.

Rutgers is endorsing the beta launch of TranZap, a web-based application designed by a Rutgers medical student for the transgender community to leave reviews for health care providers, according to a press release.

Taylor Chiang, co-creator of TranZap and a second-year student at the Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, discussed their role in the project and what made them want to create this resource.

They said that as a transgender individual, they think many aspects of health care need improvement in terms of treating the transgender community.

"A lot of the time, trans folks do avoid health care because they are afraid of the barriers that they might face," Chiang said. "Those barriers can include financial barriers like straight-up access to care, but also discrimination, harassment, trying to explain what it means to be transgender, microaggressions, things like that. I think a lot of those things are off-putting to trans folks in terms of just seeking everyday care."

Their role has consisted of advertising, creating protocols, getting feedback and more while the co-founder, Eli Lucherini, a doctoral candidate at Princeton University, has been working on the web development and coding for the app, Chiang said.

When inquiring over social media about which aspects of health care need improvement to the transgender community, Chiang often heard from community members that they do not know where to get suitable referrals or find gender-affirming health care providers, they said.

To address these issues, the app contains two main features, which are the ability to leave a review of a health care provider one has recently seen and the ability to look up those reviews once they have been left in the app, Chiang said. People can also browse for a particular physician.

Chiang said they like to see the app as similar to Yelp, except for transgender people and specific to health care. They said the reviews that are left on TranZap cover the overall experience of transgender patients with certain health care providers and answer specific questions to crowdsource information in one place.

“Did this provider ask what your preferred name was? Did this provider ask what your pronouns were? Did they use the pronouns once they asked what those pronouns were?” Chiang said. “Those are very easy yes or no questions — they either did it or they didn’t do it — and we had some other questions that people thought that would be helpful to them.”

Chiang said the idea and execution of TranZap came from their interest to participate in a medical innovation and entrepreneurship program. In order to take part in the distinction program, they were required to come up with a project and follow it through, they said.

After writing a proposal on the idea, Chiang contacted the PROUD Gender Center of New Jersey, a center at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital for LGBTQ+ resources, where they were able to expand the network they had to give feedback in the app, they said.

“The main group of folks that we will probably beta test with once that's ready is the transgender support group that is part of the PROUD Gender Center of New Jersey, so that is cool, too,” Chiang said.

Chiang said they hope their Rutgers Institutional Review Board proposal for the beta launch of the app will be approved by mid-November this year.

After approval, they can move forward with sending the app out to the transgender community, starting with the transgender support group through the PROUD Gender Center of New Jersey, Chiang said.

“The whole point of this app was really to have this project built by the trans community, run by the trans community, given the input of the trans community,” Chiang said. “Ultimately, this app is driven by the reviews of the trans community, and I think that's super important.”

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