

Inclusion in the Workplace: LGBTQI Pride Month

The following article is part of the *Inclusion in the Workplace* series, sponsored by the UPMC Center for Inclusion and the Employee Partnership Council.

June was selected as LGBTQI Pride Month to commemorate the Stonewall Riots, which took place in New York City in 1969. The riots are considered the first time that American members of the LGBTQI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, or Intersex) community fought back against police persecution and a legal system that treated people like them almost as criminals. Now, 43 years later, June has become a time to celebrate how far LGBTQI people have come in their fight for equality. UPMC employees are invited to participate in the Pride Awareness March on Sunday, June 10, and show their support for the Pittsburgh LGBTQI community.

While much progress has been made over the years, people who identify themselves as LGBTQI often still must deal with those who don't have open minds about different orientations. An area of their lives in which one wouldn't expect to encounter those attitudes is health care, because a person's orientation should have no effect on the quality of treatment he or she receives.

But a number of studies have found that this is not always the case. According to a 2005 survey referenced in an article in *American Medical News*, 22 percent of lesbian, gay, and bisexual respondents said they'd had a bad experience in the past with a health professional. Eighteen percent said they were afraid or embarrassed to talk about their health issues, and 15 percent were concerned about discrimination. The situation is often worse for transgender or nonconforming people — a study by the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force found that 19 percent of respondents were refused care outright because of their status, and 28 percent postponed needed medical care due to discrimination and disrespect.

Even before they see a health care professional, LGBTQI individuals may feel some hesitation about making an appointment.

They may see signs that people like themselves aren't welcome, such as the Food and Drug Administration's ban on gay men donating blood (even though all blood is screened). Or, while sitting in the waiting room, they may find themselves filling out patient intake forms that don't provide the option to identify themselves as LGBTQI. Many states do not recognize same-sex marriage or civil unions, which makes it more difficult or even impossible for them to be covered on their partner's health insurance.

LGBTQI patients who go into a health provider's office concerned that they won't be treated with dignity and respect also may be less likely to be open with their doctor. They may not want to disclose their orientation to their doctor (this is especially true of younger people who might not have discussed this with anyone), and this lack of openness and trust can be a serious impediment to LGBTQI patients receiving the care they need.

Finding the right doctor is important for everyone. Many LGBTQI patients have discovered understanding physicians through word of mouth, but it's important for health care providers to reach out as well. On Sunday, June 10, UPMC will host a booth at PrideFest, a day-long event that takes place along Liberty Avenue in downtown Pittsburgh, where LGBTQI-experienced doctors will be available to answer questions about issues that may be of specific interest to this community, as well as concerns that affect all patients. Attendees can ask about general health exams (such as for cholesterol and blood pressure) and also get information about sexual health screenings, immunizations, and developing a living will. Mental and emotional health topics can be discussed as well, which is important because problems such as depression and domestic violence tend to occur in higher proportions in the LGBTQI community.

It's often said that people should be tolerant of those of different backgrounds, but tolerance is not enough when it comes to medical care. To receive the best treatment, both patient and doctor must be open enough to speak and hear the truth, and that can best happen when all patients are treated with dignity and respect. Most LGBTQI people attending PrideFest will be there for the fun, music, and the scene, but they should take the time to visit the UPMC doctors who are there to listen to, and to help with, the questions about their health that people of all orientations should feel comfortable discussing.



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The deadline for 2012 ACES nominations is June 30.