

Helpful resources

Gender Trust - Supporting all those affected by gender identity issues
www.gendertrust.org

GMFA the Gay Men's Health Charity
www.gmfa.org.uk

MetroCentre Greenwich 'Sexual health and well being for the whole person'
www.metrocentreonline.org

RCN Diversity Network
www.rcn.org.uk/diversity

Sheffield Centre for HIV and Sexual Health (NHS): services, training and resources
www.sexualhealthsheffield.nhs.uk

Stonewall, an organisation willing to join with others to promote LGBT people's issues and equalities
www.stonewall.org.uk

Social Care Institute for Excellence: free 'Sexual, Reproductive and Mental Health' e-learning course
www.scie.org.uk



The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in practice and shapes health policies.

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RCN Online
www.rcn.org.uk

RCN Direct
www.rcn.org.uk/direct
0345 772 6100

Terrence Higgins Trust
www.tht.org.uk

Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) advice
www.chapsonline.org.uk

University of Greenwich for RCN approved Sexual Health Skills course
www.gre.ac.uk/schools/health/current_publications

Department of Health/NHS Briefings for Health and Social Care Staff
www.dh.gov.uk

Over the Rainbow (NHS) service and published resources
www.rainbowbournemouth.co.uk

PACE (Project for Counselling, Advocacy and Education) a lesbian and gay mental health charity, with particular projects on suicide prevention
www.pacehealth.org.uk

Department of Health: Briefing for health and social care staff (LGBT series), London, Department of Health, 2007

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The nursing care of lesbian, gay and bisexual clients

Guidance for nursing staff



Celebrating diversity and the inclusion of all people is central to the ethos of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN). Through work undertaken by its members, the RCN recognises that discrimination and prejudice towards lesbian, gay and bisexual patients still exists in some nursing and health care services. This guidance aims to support nursing staff in developing and promoting good practice in this area.

What are the concerns regarding the care of lesbian, gay and bisexual people?

1. A fear that anti lesbian, gay or bisexual attitudes from health care professionals can lead to delayed access to appropriate health services. Worry about facing negative attitudes can also lead patients not to seek care when it is needed.
 2. Some clients fear the consequences of being open about their sexuality, but also believe they cannot always get the relevant care they need if they are not honest.
 3. Some fear that they may even be physically harmed if health care practitioners are homophobic and/or that a breach of confidentiality could have negative consequences for them in relation to employment, housing, child custody or future health care.
 4. Nursing interventions aimed at promoting health and wellbeing can be lacking. This includes matters which are more prevalent and require more attention compared to that of heterosexuals such as:
 - poor mental health
 - suicide prevention
 - lack of safer sex knowledge
 - obesity
 - smoking
 - recreational drug use.
5. Discrimination by staff may become worse when compounded with differences such as age (younger or older people), parenting, physical and learning abilities, culture and minority ethnic identities. This can lead to even greater mental health suffering.
 6. A lack of support for or active hostility towards teenagers trying to come to terms with their difference from the perceived social norm could lead to mental and physical health problems.
 7. Young people can lack resilience and self-esteem, feel isolated or suffer from bullying and discrimination, because of actual or presumed sexual identities. Abuse might include physical or verbal violence and the ignoring of specific physical, mental and sexual health needs.

In conjunction with diversity/anti-discrimination legislation such as the Civil Partnership Act (2004) and Equality Act (2010) there are numerous resources and services which explore the health care needs and experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual clients (See 'Helpful resources' section).

How can staff address these concerns?

Lesbian, gay and bisexual people have specific health care needs and concerns which nurses and health care staff may not always address. The NMC *Code - Standards of conduct, performance and ethics for nurses and midwives* (2008) and

current health directives from the Department of Health outline the collective and individual responsibilities in relation to this patient group.

In clinical practice

Nurses and health care staff in clinical practice need to ensure that they never intentionally behave in a way which marginalises clients. As reflective practitioners, they must examine their behaviour to ensure that it cannot be considered as prejudicial, actively seek to raise awareness of problems among colleagues and discourage unhelpful responses, and explore all means of supporting and assisting all clients using their service.

In research

Nurses undertaking research are encouraged to develop studies of the actual and perceived health care needs and experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual people to establish how nurses can best meet the needs of their clients. This is particularly important where certain needs may be hidden or not well promoted, such as the higher risk of breast cancer in lesbians as they are less likely to have children, and there is a higher risk of breast cancer in a woman that has never been pregnant.

In education

Nurses in all areas of education have a duty to advocate inclusion of lesbian, gay and bisexual health promotion and care needs, in order to promote holistic foundations in care as well as specific conditions relating to individual people.

In purchasing

Nurses in purchasing have the potential to improve the nursing contribution towards health gain for this patient group, such as by providing relevant educational resources and leaflets, and should clearly reflect this in the contract specifications agreed with providers.

In management

The promotion of good practice and ensuring equal opportunities in relation to service provision are a requirement of current UK law.

Advice and assistance from the RCN

The RCN will continue to support the development of robust nursing practice in this area, including actively supporting equality programmes which challenge all forms of discrimination including homophobia, biphobia and heterosexism.

Any member who requires advice and assistance can contact their regional office. For information and contact details, contact RCN Direct on 0845 772 6100 or visit www.rcn.org.uk

References

Evans, David T. 'Homophobia in evidence-based practice', *Nurse Researcher*, 8(1):47-52, Autumn 2000.

McFarlane L (1998) *Diagnosis: Homophobic. The experiences of lesbians, gay men and bisexuals in mental health services*, London: PACE (Project for Advocacy, Counselling and Advice). Available from www.pacehealth.org.uk

Royal College of Nursing (2011) *Older people in care homes: sex, sexuality and intimate relationships*, London: RCN.

Tim Franks, Elizabeth Peel & Peter Scott (2010) *Where to turn: a review of current provision in online and offline mental health support for LGBT people experiencing suicidal distress*, London, PACE. Available at www.pacehealth.org.uk

Department of Health (2007): Briefing for health and social care staff (LGBT series), London, Department of Health.