

SaferSex4Seniors

Information you need to enjoy safer sexual pleasure!

What's the "T": Understanding Transgender

Q. I frequently hear "LGBT." I understand the "LGB" but what does Transgender mean?

Transgender is a label used to describe people whose biological sex and gender identity are incongruent. That is, someone who is born with the physical appearance of one sex, but feels that they were meant to be another sex. Some transgender people may pursue medical interventions that help them feel more comfortable in their bodies.

Q. I never hear about transgender elders. Why is that?

For some transgender people, particularly those who have medically transitioned, their having been assigned a different sex at birth is not something they focus on, now that they are able to live in accordance with their identity. Others may not feel safe or comfortable being "out" about their transgender identity for fear of discrimination or harassment – particularly in situations where medical care or housing are concerned.

Q. What sexual orientations do transgender people have?

Transgender people can identify as any sexual orientation – lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer are the most common orientation labels. Everyone's experience of sexual orientation is unique to them, so encourage patients to use any label they prefer. Generally, orientation labels align with the person's gender identity. Someone who identifies as a woman and is attracted to women is likely to identify as a lesbian; someone who identifies as a man and is attracted to men is likely to identify as gay; someone who is attracted to people of the opposite gender is likely to identify as heterosexual.

Q. How do transgender people navigate safer sex?

Transgender people navigate safer sex in the same way as cisgender (non-transgender) people do! Parts that are used for penetration or oral contact should be covered with a barrier; if pregnancy is a concern contraceptive methods should be used. As with all penetration, ample lubrication and taking a slow pace can be helpful in enjoying the sexual experience.

Q. Are there any medical issues specific to transgender people that medical providers should know?

Medical issues will vary greatly from person to person, based in part on the medical interventions they have used to bring their bodies more closely in line with their gender identities. Chances are, the patient is well informed about transgender health and will work with you to help determine the best route of care. Be mindful that many transgender people face prejudice in medical settings – even from people who are well intentioned. Training about how to be a trans-inclusive medical provider can be helpful.

Q. How can I make my office a safe space for transgender patients?

Adapt intake forms to include gender options other than Male and Female. Train your staff to use welcoming, respectful language. Do not permit anyone to make comments or jokes at the expense of transgender patients.

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