

Improving Healthcare for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) Patients Health Practitioners Quick Reference Guide



Sexual orientation can significantly impact on mental and physical health and LGB people are less likely to seek early help

ISSUES

ACTIONS

LANGUAGE	All language should be inclusive of LGB patients and their relationships	▶ "Do you have a partner?" "Are you in a relationship?" "What is your partner's name?"
FAMILIES & CHILDREN	Many LGB patients have very different family and parenting structures	▶ Establish structure by asking open, non-judgemental questions - "tell me about your family?" - avoid "who is the father/mother of your child"
MENTAL HEALTH	LGB people are more susceptible to mental health concerns	▶ Establish who the patient is 'out' to and what supports are in place. Consider advising referral to support agencies
STRESS	Being LGB can be an additional source of stress, depending on factors such as level of acceptance and support	▶ Identify sources of stress and levels of support/rejection. Be aware of 'internalised homophobia'. Encourage accepting the self
CONFIDENTIALITY	Some LGB patients are fearful that you will disclose to their families	▶ Reassure that everything said during a consultation is confidential
SEXUAL HEALTH	Lesbians are less likely to attend for regular smear tests and gay men are at increased risk of HIV infection	▶ Encourage LB women to attend regular smear tests. ▶ Encourage sexually active gay men to have an annual STI screen
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE	Levels of intimate-partner violence are the same as the heterosexual population	▶ Refer to domestic violence support agencies and reassure that they offer same services for LB women and GB men
GENDER	Gender identity and sexual orientation are different issues	▶ For advice and support with patients seeking information regarding gender identity issues or Trans related healthcare, contact TENI (Transgender Equality Network Ireland)
SUICIDE AND SELF HARM	LGB people are at increased risk of self harm and suicidal behaviour	▶ Recognise risk, encourage coping mechanisms and refer as necessary
INCREASED RISKS	There is an increased risk of: certain cancers, substance misuse, PCOS among LB women and substance misuse and anal cancer among gay men	▶ Be aware of the increased health risks among LGB patients and consider them in consultations

Coming 'Out'

- Recognise that this is a very significant 'big step' for LGB people. The fear of the risk of family/friend rejection, homophobia, bullying and job problems can be immense.
- Make it easy to 'come out' to you by demonstrating openness
- Be accepting – Respond positively when a patient discloses that they are lesbian, gay or bisexual and where appropriate enquire about their experience of coming out
- Try to ensure that patients have and use available supports



Useful Phrases

- "It sounds like you are questioning your feelings/orientation/identity... has that been on your mind?"
- "Have you come out to friends and family?"
- "Do you know other lesbian, gay or bisexual women/men you can talk to?"
- "Are you concerned about how people might react?"

Creating a Positive Experience for your Lesbian & Bisexual Patients

- Ensure all forms include Civil Partnership status where appropriate
- Don't assume that everyone is heterosexual
- Ensure positive attitudes to LGB patients from all staff in the Practice
- Be aware that treating people 'equally' means treating LGB patients according to their needs
- Reassure that anything discussed is confidential
- Ensure that something in the waiting room makes LGB patients feel welcome: e.g. LINC resource or LGBT Helpline poster



Support Agencies and Help Lines

LINC Advocating for Lesbian and Bisexual Women in Ireland || 021 4808600
Cork Gay Project || 021 4300430
TENI Transgender Equality Network Ireland || 085 1477166
LGBT Helpline || 1890 929 539

Good Practice LGB Guidelines for Professionals

ICGP || Irish College of General Practitioners || www.icgp.ie
IIMHN || Irish Institute of Mental Health Nursing || www.iimhn.org
CPsychI || College of Psychiatry of Ireland || www.irishpsychiatry.ie
IASW || Irish Association of Social Workers || www.iasw.ie

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