

Project QUEER: Quantifying and Understanding Essential Educational Resources

An Assessment of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Healthcare Needs on the University of Florida Campus

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BACKGROUND

Sexual and gender minorities historically have had fewer rights and faced larger amounts of stigma than non-minority groups. This marginalization is often at the root of a variety of problems pertaining to mental and physical health. The LGBT+ community has made recent gains in regards to civil rights but still endures a great deal of social stigma.

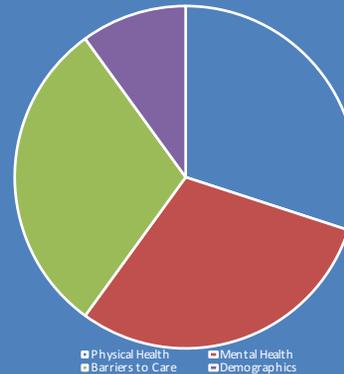
Varied mental and physical health concerns exist for LGBT+ students on campus. This age group may specifically face the stress of increased levels of independence and decreased parental supervision, as well as potentially “coming out” to those around them for the first time. While students may wish to turn to healthcare professionals for guidance in both mental and physical health concerns, these professionals often lack the knowledge to properly deal with or recognize issues specific to the LGBT+ community. This may lead to feelings of abandonment or exclusion for LGBT+ students, and additionally may compound existing health problems or create new ones. There is an unmet need for physicians to increase competency related to LGBT+ specific issues.

This pilot study aimed to assess any unmet health needs of the LGBT+ community on the University of Florida campus, as well as gain a better understanding of student perception of provider knowledge and attitudes toward LGBT+ patients.

METHODS

In order to assess student perception of healthcare delivery on campus, a questionnaire was devised that had both multiple choice and fill in the blank aspects. The questionnaire was created using Redcap and distributed to LGBT+ student organizations via social media and listserv postings. The main components of the questionnaire are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Components of Questionnaire



Various challenges were encountered in the creation and distribution of the questionnaire, but the most significant were:

- **Narrowing down questions.** A comprehensive literature review was used to identify specific LGBT+ health concerns. A team-based approach was taken to identify the most relevant topics to include in order to ensure the survey was manageable in length; however, it was difficult to include all potential topics within a brief online questionnaire.
- **Being cognizant of various sexualities and gender identities.** Gender and sexual identities are a sensitive topic, and priorities in creating the questionnaire were 1) leaving room for participants to define their own gender and sexual identities in a way that did not limit them to a minimal number of specific categories, and 2) taking into account the language and phrasing within the questionnaire was inclusive and respectful.
- **Recruitment.** A limitation of the questionnaire was the limited number of responses received. This is presumably due to both distribution over the summer semester and having only a brief amount of time (two weeks) to speak with student organization leaders prior to questionnaire distribution. In the future, allowing more time to build a relationship with students in the target community will be a focus in order to both tailor interventions more specifically to the participants and to boost recruitment numbers.

- **Finding ways to give back.** In order to avoid collection of data without dissemination of results to the participants, study results were analyzed and an infographic was created such that the results could be presented in an easy-to-read manner. The infographic was then distributed to the student organizations that were targeted for recruitment.

IMPLICATIONS

For some UF students, direct barriers to healthcare exist that affect both their identity as LGBT+ and their immediate physical health, as noted in this quote from a participant:

"[I am] Unable to speak about being trans and starting testosterone due to being on my father's insurance. It creates the barrier of being myself."

Therefore, a key implication may be that LGBT+ students feel limited by not just healthcare providers, but by the larger system in which they receive their healthcare. Other students, however, feel directly affected by provider attitude or treatment:

"The few times I have disclosed that I am bisexual/queer to the student health center, they dismissed my identity as irrelevant because I am a woman currently partnered with a man...I have since stopped bothering to come out because it only makes me feel extremely uncomfortable."

Sexuality and gender identity can be difficult for students to discuss with healthcare providers, especially if the students fear negative judgment or direct barriers to treatment. This study has highlighted the need for improved provider competence toward those who fall on the LGBT+ spectrum. The planned next steps are as follows:

- **Create curriculum about LGBT+ knowledge and health issues for physicians**
- **Facilitate focus groups for the curriculum with UF physicians**
- **Disseminate curriculum in a pilot test with UF physicians**