Asking patients about Sexual and Gender Identity

Rockland Psychiatric Center, 2012
Outline

- WHAT are sexual and gender identity? Definitions
- WHY would we want to ask our patients these questions?
- WHO should we ask about sexual and gender identity?
- WHAT questions should we ask?
WHAT -- Definitions

- **Sexual Orientation**
  - Whether someone is attracted to same-sex partners, opposite-sex partners, both, or neither

- **Sexual Identity**
  - The identity a person adopts based on his or her sexual orientation
  - Sexual orientation and sexual identity may not be the same
  - Sexual orientation usually does not change, but sexual identity may change over time
Definitions, cont’d

- Gender identity
  - Whether someone identifies as male, female, transgender, or something else (e.g., genderqueer, between two genders)

- Gender role or expression
  - Behaviors and dress that identify a person as masculine or feminine
  - A person doesn’t have to be transgender to be different in terms of gender expression, e.g., tomboys, sissies, “metrosexual” men, drag performers
Definitions, cont’d

- Lesbian
  - A woman attracted to other women
- Gay
  - Attracted to the same sex; can refer to men or women
- Bisexual
  - Attracted to both sexes
- Transgender
  - Someone whose birth sex is different from their gender identity
- Queer
  - A broader term for LGB people, takes back a previously hated term
- Heterosexual/straight
  - Attracted to the opposite sex
Definitions, cont’d

- Sexual minority
- Gender minority
- LGBT or LGBTQ or LGBTQQ
Sexual ID and Gender ID

- Two different concepts
- Someone who is gay or heterosexual may have a conventional gender expression or not
- Someone who is transgender may identify as straight, gay, or bisexual
WHY ask about sexual and gender id?

- The Joint Commission is making us ask!
- Part of culturally competency
- Part of person-centered treatment
The JC Standards

- RR.01.01.01

The hospital prohibits discrimination based on age, race, ethnicity, religion, culture, language, physical or mental disability, socioeconomic status, sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity or expression.

- Like asking about ethnicity and preferred language, asking about sexual and gender identity is part of providing person-centered treatment.
Ok, but WHY is the JC making us ask?

- Treatment alliance
- Risk factors for mental health and health problems
- Better diagnosis and treatment
Research informs regulation

- Institute of Medicine Report (2011, *The Health of LGBT People*)
  - Recommended better research data on demographics, health inequities, intervention research, and transgender needs research
  - Recommended standardizing and requiring data collection on sexual and gender identity
Risk factors for health problems

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) report on top health issues for LGBT populations (2012)
  - Increased risk for depression, suicide, being a victim of violence for LGBT population
  - Increased smoking in LGBT population and increased obesity in lesbian population lead to risk of heart disease and cancer
  - These risks are thought to be due to minority stress
Better Dx and Tx: Martha
WHO should we ask?
What if my heterosexual or non-transgender patients get offended at these questions?

- You could use the procedural defense: “I am required to ask these questions by the Joint Commission.”

- Much better yet, you can use this as an opportunity for education: “I can’t tell by looking at someone whether they are gay or straight, transgender or not, so I have to ask everyone.”
WHAT questions should we ask?

- The 725
  - What is your gender identity: male, female, transgender, other?
  - What is your sexual identity: straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, other?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transgender or Sexual Orientation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Male to Female Transgender</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Female to Male Transgender</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Heterosexual or Straight</td>
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<td>□ Gay or Homosexual</td>
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<td>□ Lesbian</td>
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<td>□ Bisexual</td>
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<td>□ Not Sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Other</td>
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WHAT to ask, cont’d

- Psychosocial evaluation, Psychiatric evaluation
  - Want to get a fuller picture, not just of identity, but orientation, relationships
  - Ask again about identity: What is your gender identity? male, female, transgender, other?
    What is your sexual identity: straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, other?
  - Orientation/attraction: Who are you attracted to? men, women, both?
  - Relationships: Are you in a relationship? With who?
  - Behavior: Are you sexually active with men, women, both? (they can also say neither)
WHY ask all these questions: Larry
Going beyond

- Add gay and trans-affirmative booklets, posters to unit, waiting area, triage room
- Educate self and other staff on special issues of sexual and gender minority patients