

# Male, Female, Other: Transgender and the Impact in Primary Care

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## ABSTRACT

Transgender includes patients at various stages of their journey. It is important that providers care for transgender patients with a culturally sensitive approach, awareness, and competent skill. There are new terms to learn. There may be mental health issues or substance use issues. Hormone therapy can have an impact on a person's health. As a primary care provider, it is important to be alert to these potential issues, addressing the patient's individual needs. In this study we discuss the transgender patient and outline basic care and issues that can arise in a primary care setting.

**Keywords:** hormone therapy, primary care, transgender

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## BACKGROUND

### Incidence

Transgender individuals come from a variety of backgrounds, races, religions, ethnic groups, and socioeconomic statuses, with many having fully productive lives. The number of transgender individuals is difficult to estimate due to lack of uniform data collection, with a wide range of estimates for both transfemale/male-to-female and transmale/female-to-male.<sup>1</sup> The incidence is most likely to be much higher as data do not capture individuals who do not have a primary provider or may be obtaining their treatments from unauthorized individuals. With the passing of the Affordable Care Act came provisions for stronger data collection, so it is hoped that more accurate data will be available in the near future.

### Disparities

Transgender individuals face health disparities related to social stigma, discrimination, and denial of human rights. This results in higher rates of HIV/sexually transmitted diseases, victimization, substance abuse, and psychiatric disorders.<sup>2</sup> Transgender youth are more likely to be homeless and 2-3 times more likely to attempt suicide.<sup>2</sup> Elderly transgender individuals have additional barriers to health care due to isolation and lack of trained social services and providers.

Transgender people are also less likely to have health insurance.<sup>2</sup>

Barriers to health care for the transgender person tend to center around 4 main issues: reluctance to disclose one's identity; lack of experienced providers and resources; financial barriers; and structural barriers.<sup>1</sup> Disclosure can range from the difficulty communicating with the primary provider as well as others in the community, such as pharmacists or laboratory technicians.<sup>3</sup> Structural barriers include lack of unisex restrooms, inpatient room assignment based on gender, accurate documentation in electronic record and billing/coding systems, and appropriate reference ranges in laboratory systems. Financial barriers include lack of insurance coverage for gender-specific laboratory testing, medications, and reassignment surgery. Some people have benefit limits of mental health visits per year. Medical and nursing programs lack education related to the care of the transgender patient, making the availability of quality, culturally competent care sparse. One of the goals of Healthy People 2020 is to improve the health, safety, and well-being of transgender individuals by providing culturally competent health care and improving education on transgender patients in medical schools.<sup>2,4</sup> This should include education and awareness by all health care providers, increasing the number of providers capable of delivering

**Table 1. Resources in Transgender Care**

A Provider’s Introduction to Substance Abuse Treatment for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Individuals (SAMHSA)	<a href="http://store.samhsa.gov/product/A-Provider-s-Introduction-to-Substance-Abuse-Treatment-for-Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-and-Transgender-Individuals/SMA12-4104/">http://store.samhsa.gov/product/A-Provider-s-Introduction-to-Substance-Abuse-Treatment-for-Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-and-Transgender-Individuals/SMA12-4104/</a>
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health	<a href="http://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/transgender.htm/">http://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/transgender.htm/</a>
Center of Excellence for Transgender Health	<a href="http://transhealth.ucsf.edu/trans?page=home-00-00">http://transhealth.ucsf.edu/trans?page=home-00-00</a>
National LGBT Health Education Center	<a href="http://www.lgbthealtheducation.org/training/learning-modules/">http://www.lgbthealtheducation.org/training/learning-modules/</a>
Guidelines for Care of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Patients	<a href="http://www.lgbthealtheducation.org/training/learning-modules/">http://www.lgbthealtheducation.org/training/learning-modules/</a>
Advancing Effective Communication, Cultural Competence, and Patient- and Family-centered Care for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Community	<a href="http://www.jointcommission.org/lgbt/">http://www.jointcommission.org/lgbt/</a>

competent care, and thus improving access to care. Resources for the provider are included in [Table 1](#).

**CONSIDERATIONS IN PRIMARY CARE**

**Transgender Defined**

Gender dysphoria is recognized by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)* as a mental health condition.<sup>5</sup> There is new terminology specific to the transgender population.<sup>6,7</sup> Gender is often mistakenly referred to when identifying whether someone was born a female or a male, a very distinct binary concept. What many people believe as gender is actually sex, which is the biologic assignment at birth, the physical attributes of a person. It is important for the practitioner to not interchange these terms as they hold different meaning to different individuals. Characteristics of gender dysphoria, along with other terminology, are presented in [Table 2](#).

**Table 2. Definitions Related to Transgender**

Gender dysphoria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marked incongruence between one’s experienced or expressed gender and their assigned gender.</li> <li>• Must be present for at least 6 months.</li> <li>• Must be manifested by a strong desire to be the other gender or some alternative gender that differs from their assigned gender.</li> <li>• Must also be associated with significant distress or impairment regarding social, school, or other important areas of functioning.</li> </ul>
Gender	Range of characteristics of men and women/masculinity and femininity assigned by society.
Gender expression/ gender role	Expression of masculinity or femininity by a person based on societal, cultural, and individual expectations.
Gender identity	A person’s sexual identity with male, female, neither, or both.
Genderqueer	A person who does not identify with either male or female. They may identify with both, neither, or somewhere in between.
Transgender	Umbrella term that includes anyone whose self-identity, behavior, or anatomy falls outside of societal norms and expectations.
Transsexual	Person whose gender identity is not congruent with their biologic sex. They may or may not pursue treatment to bring congruency to their gender identity.
Transmale	Individual who was born a female but identifies with male and MAY have used hormonal and/or surgical treatment to become a male.
Transfemale	Individual who was born a male but identifies with being female and MAY have used hormonal and/or surgical treatment to become a female.
Two spirit	Native American term that refers to someone who identifies with both multiple genders.
Cisgender	The state of not being transgender; people who identify with the sex that they were assigned at birth.

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