

TRANSGENDER HEALTH CARE- NURSES' ROLE

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Abstract— Nurses interact with transgender patients in a variety of settings. Interacting with and caring diverse population like transgenders is still perceived as a challenge by many nurses in India. Mostly nursing literature is silent about caring of such population especially during period of transition. The article material is collected from various sources like journals and online data base of last 5 years. Online search engines were Pubmed, CINHAI and google scholar

Index terms: *Transgender health, nursing care and gender affirmative care*

INTRODUCTION

Transgender: A person whose gender identity differs from that sex which was assigned at birth. Sometimes abbreviated to trans. A transman is one with gender identity of a male and a female birth assigned sex; a transwoman is one with gender identity of a female and a male birth assigned sex. A non-transgender person is referred to as cisgender¹.

WHY DO TRANSGENDER HEALTH CARE IS TODAY'S NEED?

Worldwide transgenders are marginalized and experience high levels of social exclusion and challenges. They are not able to attend the full health potential. Although, there have been attempts to provide legal recognition to them in India .Allowing them to participate in elections, according them a separate gender status in passport and other identification documents like Unique Identification (Aadhar) Cards as well as the Supreme Court judgment recognizing the constitutional rights of TGs in 2015, these have not reduced the discrimination they face in daily life. Unless health services are designed in accordance with the needs of transgender people and in consultation with them, it may be difficult to reach them. There are major health inequities between transgender people and many other members of society and that transgender people were often unable to access the health services they need because of their social and economic marginalization. While the transgender community may have received legal recognition, their access to quality healthcare remains alarmingly scarce in India²

Discrimination, stigma, and violence, along with other social, political, and economic factors, significantly affect the physical, mental, and behavioral health of transgender adults. Research demonstrates that, compared with the general population, transgender people suffer from more chronic health conditions and experience higher rates of health problems related to HIV/AIDS, substance use, mental illness, and sexual and physical violence, as well as higher prevalence and earlier onset of disabilities that can also lead to health issues. Minority stress is yet another factor contributing to poor physical and mental health of transgender persons.³

NURSING CARE OF TRANSGENDER PATIENTS

Nurses interact with transgender patients in a variety of settings. Inpatient or outpatient, medical or surgical or psychiatric this patient population is represented and deserves appropriate care. Transgender patients have the same healthcare concerns as cisgender individuals. Nurses' knowledge and attitude about transgenders play a vital role in delivering gender affirmative care.

COMMON PITFALLS THAT OCCUR WHEN TRANSGENDER PATIENTS ACCESS HEALTHCARE

- Healthcare professionals and reception staff using the incorrect pronoun for a patient
- Failing to include a patient's chosen name on the medical care record or prescriptions – this can lead to embarrassment and/or confusion at the practice and pharmacy
- Inconsistency with regard to completion of blood request forms, gender-specific care (eg breast, cervix and prostate) and offer of a cheaper one
- Access to gender-specific toilets
- Assuming that all people with gender dysphoria will require mental health interventions
- Healthcare professionals' assuming that concurrent health issues are directly related to a patient's trans status
- Insisting that people change their gender role before starting endocrine therapies
- Misunderstanding issues surrounding sexual orientation. For example, patients do not wish for their trans status to be incorrectly equated to orientation and it is important that physicians do not assume a patient's orientation⁴

STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE TRANSGENDER NURSING CARE

- Nurses need to stand up and participate in research that ameliorates communication practices, preventive services, and the effects of treatments for transgender.
- Learning and keeping an open mind about the unique needs of transgender will strengthen advocacy.
- Create a welcoming environment by posting a gender-inclusive nondiscrimination bill of rights.
- Create unisex or single-stall restrooms.

- Collect feedback from transgender patients and families.
- Modify forms to include gender-neutral language.
- Include cultural competency continuing education for all staff annually.
- Avoid gender-based assumptions when selecting hospital clothing for patients.
- Display Transgender-friendly symbols or signs.
- Consider issues of personal privacy related to nurse-patient conversations.
- Consider issues of personal privacy when the patient is in an open holding area or intake area.
- Provide patients and family/friends a copy of the policy for handling gender-based grievances

CREATING A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT IN HEALTH CARE SETTING

- Transgender inclusive patient education materials
- Not assuming sexual orientation or gender identity
- Asking what preferred name and pronouns patients use
- Using terms such as partner
- Displaying signs of Transgender acceptance
- Mirroring language that patients use for themselves, their partners, and their bodies
- Providing Transgender care training for all staff.

TRANSITION RELATED HEALTH NEEDS AND CARE

Transgender people experience various challenges when choosing whether to live according to their gender identity or not. Few transgenders decide to make physical transformation to adapt their body to their gender identity. Some transgender individuals opt both hormonal therapy and surgeries, while others only need some of these options and some others none⁶

Transition-related medical care, otherwise referred to as gender- confirming therapy, is designed to assist an individual with the adjustment of primary and secondary sexual characteristics to align with gender identity. Gender- confirming therapy may include hormonal therapy, surgical therapy, or both depending on individual needs and wishes, as well as ability to access such services. Procedures for gender confirmation may include breast or chest surgery, hysterectomy, genital reconstruction, facial hair removal, and plastic reconstruction, as appropriate to the particular person.⁷

NURSING CARE OF PATIENTS IN TRANSITION

- Assess well-being of patient with transition
- Assess social effect of transition
- Assess the progression and the degree of masculinization or feminizat
- Monitor mood swings and notif the physician
- Discuss family issues if any
- Review and counsel regarding medication use
- If post-surgery, keep the surgical site clean and follow-up exams to monitor healing and assess for manifestations of infection.
- Monitor function of genitals and donation sites (forearm, leg, etc.)
- Encourage health care follow up, including pap smear, breast exam, mammogram, STD screening, and prostate screening
- Monitor loss of neo-vaginal depth/length if dilation is not done
- Assess for skin tears and pain with rough dilation or sexual penetration
- Teach transwomenpatients that they can still get their opposite sex partners pregnant. To make enough sperm, patients should stop taking feminizing hormones for at least 3-6 months. Likewise, transmen patients can get pregnant whether they are taking hormones or not.
- Teach transgender patients to use contraceptive without hormones. Advise the patients to be aware that unprotected sex not only lead to unwanted pregnancies, but also puts them at risk for STDs.

SERVICES FOR TRANSGENDER PEOPLE AND LOVED ONES

- Help finding health/social services, and assistance to navigate health/social service systems
- Information about best practice guidelines, standards of care, and client/patient rights
- Peer-based exploration of gender identity, gender expression, and life stresses in a nonjudgmental setting
- Support and information for family members, partners, friends, and other loved ones
- Outreach to transgender people working in the survival sex trade
- Free training sessions for peer support volunteers
- Information about transgender community groups

CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN CARING TRANSGENDER PATIENTS

Cultural competency refers to the ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with diverse populations. It can be greatly measured by awareness, attitude, knowledge, skills, behaviors, policies, procedures, and organizational systems of the people involved.

Transgender cultural competency involves an understanding of terms related to identities, and concepts associated with transgender and gender-nonconforming communities, including utilizing culturally appropriate or neutral language and behavior for addressing and working with transgender populations; broadening understanding of the socioeconomic, health, and legal issues that transgender people face; and developing and implementing culturally appropriate systems and service approaches for working with transgender individuals and families.⁸

If adequate training is provided to the healthcare providers, this will facilitate a better understanding of the transgender culture, which would help in promoting better competence in imparting treatment. This training would also improve their inclusion into society. Improving nurses' knowledge would not only benefit the them but would also allow for a positive relationship between nurses and trans patients to develop over time, which may increase patients' utilization of healthcare services. Many trans people reported to encounter nurses who ask inappropriate questions regarding their trans identity or body parts, or questions that are irrelevant to their care. Unnecessary inquiry into such details can be humiliating. A patient's purpose is not to satisfy one's interest and that even if a question is relevant to one's care, it must be asked with sensitivity and appropriateness. As noted above, such sensitivity is key to cultural competence, and cannot be overstated.

CONCLUSION

Nurses are ethically obligated to respect every patient who requires and receives care. The *Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements* obligates nurses to practice with “compassion and respect for the inherent dignity, worth, and unique attributes of every person”.

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