Transgender 101: Increasing Nursing Cultural Competence To Address Health Care Disparities
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What’s the Problem?
Out of ignorance and prejudice, society marginalizes transgender people. In many cases, their basic humanity and rights are not recognized. Tragically, transgender individuals, particularly transgender women of color, are often the targets of violence for simply living authentically.

Historically, this population’s health needs have been ignored by American medicine and nursing. Only within the past two decades has the American Medical Association acknowledged that transgender-related care is medically necessary and should be covered by insurance. Only in 2014, did the American Psychiatric Association recognize that merely being transgender was not a mental health disorder. The American Nurses Association is silent on any issue directly related to transgender health care needs. Transgender-related issues are ignored in current nursing textbooks, including those focused on cultural competence.

Healthy People 2020, for the first time, acknowledged the major healthcare discrepancy within this population’s health care needs. Out of ignorance and prejudice, society ignores and mythologizes the transgender population and what they do know is often wrong and based on negative stereotypes and myths.

The Problem by the Numbers
- Only 8% of Americans state they know someone transgender
- From a study by Grant et al. (2011)13, transgender respondents reported: 51% were bullied / harassed in school
- 61% were physically assaulted
- 64% were sexually assaulted
- 4X more likely to live in poverty
- 2X the rate of unemployment (4X for people of color)
- 47% suffered adverse work action because of discrimination
- 90% suffered workplace harassment or discrimination
- 41% attempted suicide

Health Care Provider problems (A Global Issue):
- 71% of transgender patients reported mistreatment/harassment by provider
- 82% of medical and nursing students lack LGBT cultural competence
- 0 - number of current nursing textbooks that include transgender health issues
- 0 - courses on transgender health in medical school curriculum

What Should a Nurse Know?
“Transgender” is an umbrella term that encompasses several different sub-communities:
- Transsexual (Male-to-Female / M2F or MTF & Female-to-Male / F2M or FTM)
- Cross Dressers
- Genderqueer (An individual who identifies as not exclusively male or female)

Top 10 Myths 6,12
- Being trans is a choice
- Transgender = Immoral
- Gender identity = sexual orientation
- All trans people are just men in dresses
- All transgender people care about is sex
- All trans people have surgery
- Trans people are not “real” men / women
- Trans people are protected under federal law
- You can tell one by looking at them
- You can’t change your gender

Health Care Impacts Caused by Health Care Disparities
From Healthy People 2020:
- Increased risk of suicide
- Increased risk of HIV/STD infection
- Increased mental health concerns
- Increased risk of violence
- Increased substance abuse
- Decreased insurance coverage

The Standard of Care
DMS-512
- DSM-5: Gender Identity Disorder Removed – Transgender ≠ Mental Disorder
- DSM-5: Gender Dysphoria Added as New Chapter
- WPATH SOC: Gender Non-conformity is not Pathological ≠ Gender Dysphoria
- WPATH SOC: Flexible, Patient-focused, Medically Necessary

What Can a Nurse Do?
3 Basic Communication Techniques: First and Foremost: BE RESPECTFUL
- Transgender is an adjective - NOT a noun
- Do NOT refer to a transgender person as (n): He/She
- Do NOT use the proper gender pronouns: If you don’t know, Ask!
- Genderqueer individuals may prefer: They or Ze (Ze/Hir/His/Mirs)14

Avoid Improper Questions: Don’t ASK:
- “Are you pre-op or post-op?”
- “Which bathroom do you use?”
- “When did you choose to be transgender?”
- “How do you have sex?”15

If you start a sentence with “I don’t mean any disrespect but...” think twice before finishing.

References
8. Transequality.org/PDFs/Executive_Summary.pdf