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Increasing Patient Access to LGBTQ+ Healthcare through Expanding the Vermont Diversity Health Project

Rachel Harrison, MS3

Family Medicine Rotation 5; Dec 2020 – Jan 2021

Colchester Family Medicine Practice

Project Mentor: Dr. Anthony Williams, MD

Problem Identification

- Numerous studies have documented various disparities in health outcomes and barriers to healthcare access for LGBTQ+ individuals. These include access to healthcare, mental health resources, and a variety of clinical outcomes.^{1,2,3}
- In 2015, the American College of Physicians published official policy positions and recommendations in order to “achieve equity for LGBT individuals in the health care system,” such as eliminating sexuality- or gender-based discrimination and increasing provider knowledge on trans care.⁴
- However, medical education on LGBTQ+ healthcare for both physicians and nurses has been assessed to be lacking, in addition to a potential lack of understanding and/or acceptance of LGBTQ+ patients overall in a medical practice.⁵

Public Health Costs

- In 2013, the top medical condition in the US in terms of estimated spending was mental health disorders. This was estimated \$201 billion in 2013.⁶
 - In Vermont, the proposed FY 2020 budget for mental health spending was just under \$267 million.⁷
 - Considering many LGBTQ+ individuals have increased risk of mental health issues compared to non-queer counterparts,^{1,3} some contribution to this cost should be attributed to the many preventable causes of this mental health disparity.
- Other health burdens include those disparities that the LGBTQ+ community must face, including, but not limited to:
 - Increased levels of smoking (gay and bisexual men)⁸
 - Increased obesity, arthritis, asthma, and poorer overall health (lesbian and bisexual women)²
 - Differences in rates of drinking, sleep behaviors, stroke, and cancer (across different ethnicities and sexual minority groups)⁹

Community Perspective

“A significant barrier to overcome is as simple as finding a provider that you’re able to come out to, especially in mental health services. It is necessary for all health services to be affirming and safe spaces with providers that have cultural competency, so that clients can really work at core issues.”

“The Vermont Diversity Health Project relies on word of mouth and community members to help connect others to its services... At one point we had organizations/groups of providers listed in the database, but have changed to listing individual providers... It would be great to be directly connected to the doctor’s office so that community members have access to more services and providers.”

- Taylor Small, Health and Wellbeing Director at Pride Center of Vermont

“I think overall, almost every provider at Colchester Family practice is receptive to having LGBTQ+ patients, or assisting in their care. We have had patients who are transgender that have asked about providers who have also gone through transitioning or who are knowledgeable about it. I definitely think it will be helpful to inform providers about the [VDHP] database and I especially think it would be helpful to have pamphlets for patients and parents of patients who are LGBTQ+, as well. There are a good number of parents learning more about their own children who aren’t always sure who to reach out to.”

- Dr. Anthony Williams, MD – PCP at Colchester Family Medicine Practice

Intervention and Methodology

- A pamphlet was created with the VDHP program description, how to sign up, and information on how to request a LGBTQ+ Best Practices training workshop. A QR code was included so providers could be brought directly to the VDHP website to access all options.¹⁰
- The online version of this pamphlet was distributed to providers at the Colchester FM practice.
- Additionally, a short presentation was given to the providers at Colchester Family Medicine to tell them about VDHP and answer questions about this project.

VERMONT DIVERSITY HEALTH PROJECT (VDHP)

- FOR PROVIDERS -



WHAT IS VDHP?

"The Vermont Diversity Health Project (VDHP) exists to improve the health and wellness of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) Vermonters by building bridges between healthcare providers and LGBTQ people throughout the state. Our goal is to help patients identify safe, affirming, supportive, and effective healthcare providers, and offer trainings and other support to enhance providers' skill in working with LGBTQ people." -- VDHP "About the Program," Pride Center of Vermont

PATIENTS SEEKING SAFE, AFFIRMING PROVIDERS



Aside from typical barriers to healthcare that many individuals face, such as costs, transportation, and medical literacy, LGBTQ+ individuals must also navigate "coming out" to providers. It is important for LGBTQ+ patients to feel that they will not be judged for their sexuality or gender identity and have confidence that providers are knowledgeable about LGBTQ+ specific health issues.

VARIETY OF PROVIDERS IN THE DATABASE



Providers can sign up themselves or be nominated by patients or clients to join the VDHP database. Providers range from physicians, to dentists, to physical therapists, to naturopaths (and many more!). Once part of the database, patients/clients can search for a specific healthcare field and view on a map where VDHP providers are located!

LGBTQ+ BEST PRACTICES TRAININGS



For groups of providers seeking training in LGBTQ+ Best Practices, the Pride Center of VT offers a workshop to provide information on how to best serve LGBTQ+ patients and clients. The Pride Center will take into account information about the culture of a specific practice in order to tailor the workshop to a group's needs and interests.

HOW TO CONNECT WITH VERMONT DIVERSITY HEALTH PROJECT



Interested in joining the VDHP, hosting an LGBTQ+ Best Practices training, or learning more about VDHP in general?

Scan the QR code below to access the VDHP website, or reach out to Taylor Small (Health and Wellness Director at Pride Center of Vermont) by one of the following methods:



SCAN ME

Phone: 802-860-7812 // Email: taylor@pridecentervt.org

Response Data



- The presentation to Colchester Family Medicine providers was well received.



- Providers had questions about the LGBTQ+ Best Practices Training and indicated interest in hosting a workshop at the practice.



- Many providers indicated they would be interested in joining the VDHP database.

Evaluation of Effectiveness

Proposal for Evaluation

- Survey physicians at Colchester Family Medicine anonymously to determine how many joined the VDHP database.
- Follow up with Colchester Family Med and Pride Center of Vermont to confirm an LGBTQ+ Best Practices training.
- Long-term follow up could include another survey to determine if future patients came to their care from finding them on the VDHP database.

Limitations

- There was no overall survey conducted of the physicians' comfort/knowledge of caring for LGBTQ+ patients, and there may be great variability amongst providers at Colchester Family Medicine.
- The information was not conveyed to other types of providers, such as nurses, or support staff at the clinic.



Recommendations for Future Intervention

- Distribute the pamphlet and information to non-physician providers at Colchester Family Practice.
- Distribute the pamphlet and information to providers at other Primary Care clinics in the UVMHN.
- Create a patient-facing version to inform patients about the VDHP, so they may find safe/affirming practitioners in a variety of fields.

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