

Hannibal Person

Transgender Health Panel Reveals Challenges in Accessing Care

For the first time in Duke Medical Center's history, a Transgender Health Panel organized by the DukeMed Gay-Straight Alliance and sponsored by the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and Alumni Affairs, was held at Duke Clinical Research Institute on March 18, 2013.

Over forty medical students, staff and faculty members attended to hear the perspectives of four transgender panelists from the triangle community. A wide variety of questions were posed by the diverse audience, made up of Community MDs, Medical, Nursing, and PA students, Clinical Social Workers, and Chaplains. A wide variety of questions were posed to the panel, including questions about the surgical procedures that some transgender individuals undergo, and whether or not health insurance covers transgender-related health services. Others asked about what it meant to the panelists to have these issues discussed, when not long ago few providers welcomed transgender patients into their clinics.

Throughout the rich conversation that took place, it became clear that transgender individuals face unique challenges in accessing healthcare. Each panelist related stories of struggling, some with lack of insurance coverage, some with uncaring staff or providers. Some panelist accounts reflected receiving care at unwelcoming clinics and hospitals, or having to educate their doctors about the care they needed. One panelist made an important point about healthcare information technology, relating that even paperwork and health records that do not allow transgender patients to represent their gender identity and preferred name can result in transgender patients feeling marginalized. Another panelist articulated that she has to go to multiple different providers to get her medical care, and she wishes that Duke had a "transgender team" of providers. Each panelist shared their appreciation for staff and providers who had taken the time to ensure they received excellent care, from creating welcoming and inclusive clinics to getting to know them and their priorities.

Many attendees offered feedback that this panel was just a beginning, as they try to make their care more inclusive of transgender patients. They hope that this dialogue and these learning opportunities can continue within the Medical Center. The Duke Clinical Social Work Department will be offering a transgender panel discussion in their Fall 2013 Continuing Education Program. The Duke University Center for LGBT Life routinely offers education and services for LGBT students. Other initiatives and programs are being discussed and planned throughout the Health System as well.

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