

Queer Student Experiences with Reproductive Health Care at UNC Campus Health

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Introduction

Queer (i.e., non-heterosexual) individuals face several barriers to accessible and high-quality health care.

Barriers include:

- Lack of resources for LGBTQ health
- Lack of LGBTQ health knowledge among providers
- Patients' fear of disclosure of gender or sexual identity due to potential discrimination
- Lack of insurance

One area in which queer people face barriers is reproductive health care, which this study defines as gynecological services, birth control and contraception services, sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing, prevention, and treatment, and pregnancy care.

Disparities include that queer people are:

- Less likely to receive contraceptive counseling or use contraceptives
- More likely to experience STIs and unintended pregnancy
- More likely to delay Pap smears, cervical cancer screenings, breast exams, and mammograms

Several factors contribute to positive reproductive health care experiences for queer people, including non-judgmental providers, gender-neutral language used by providers and on forms, and health care settings with signs of LGBTQ equality.

This study explores queer undergraduate students' experiences seeking and receiving reproductive health care at UNC Campus Health. Specifically, three questions are addressed:

1. Are queer students comfortable approaching and interacting with providers?
2. Do queer students believe that providers provide LGBTQ competent care?
3. What images and language contribute to a welcoming environment for queer students?

Results provide insight into queer-competent reproductive health care and inform suggestions about inclusive care at UNC Campus Health.

Methods

Undergraduates who identify as queer or non-heterosexual were recruited to complete an anonymous online survey

- 47 participants submitted responses

Survey sections:

1. Likert scale to measure whether participants perceive reproductive health care providers as approachable
2. Likert scale to measure whether participants perceive reproductive health care providers as LGBTQ-competent
3. Questions about effects of signs about LGBTQ equality
4. Questions about effects of gender-neutral language
5. Open ended question 1: factors that would make participants more comfortable seeking and/or receiving reproductive health care
6. Open ended question 2: experiences with disclosure of sexual orientation to reproductive health care providers

Responses in sections 1-4 were analyzed quantitatively

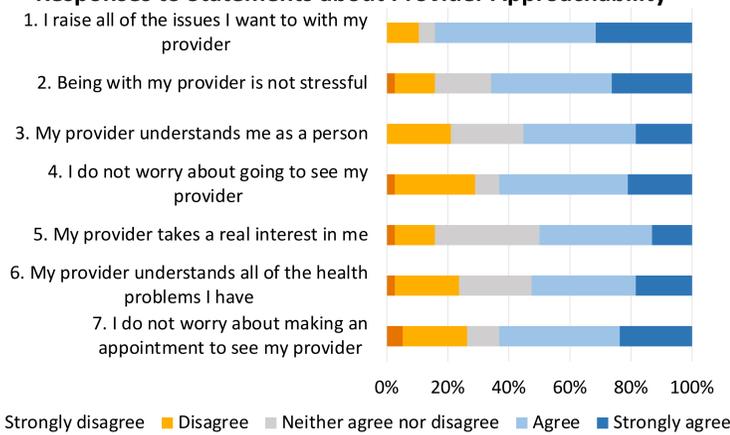
Responses in sections 5-6 were coded and analyzed thematically

Results

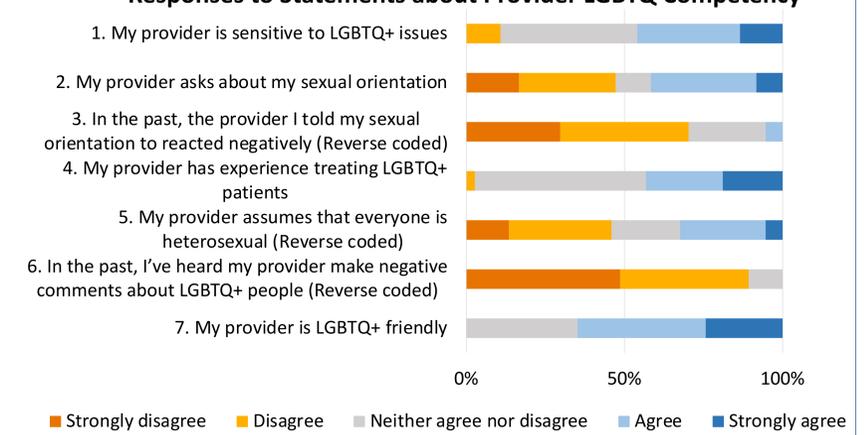
Findings

- Most participants agreed that reproductive health care providers at UNC Campus Health are approachable and LGBTQ-competent
- Participants were neutral to the statement "My provider asks about my sexual orientation." Sexual orientation disclosure is associated with positive health outcomes, so this finding may indicate a need for provider behavior change

Responses to Statements about Provider Approachability



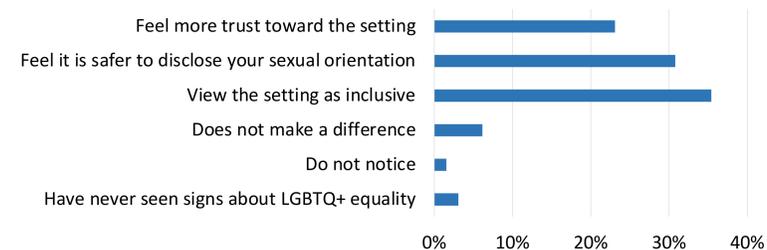
Responses to Statements about Provider LGBTQ Competency



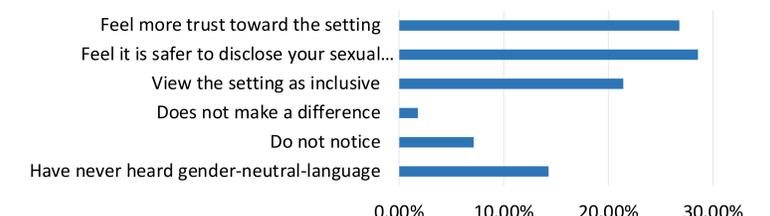
Findings

- 20-40% of participants reported that signs of LGBTQ equality and gender-neutral language cause them to feel more trust toward the setting, feel it is safer to disclose sexual orientation, and view the setting as inclusive.
- However, 14% of participants have never heard gender-neutral language at UNC Campus Health

When you see signs or images about LGBTQ equality or other signs of acceptance at UNC Campus Health, how do you feel?



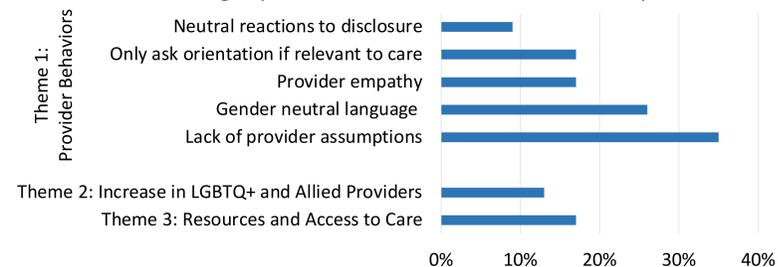
When you hear gender-neutral language at UNC Campus Health, how do you feel? (e.g., they instead of she/he, partner instead of girlfriend/boyfriend)?



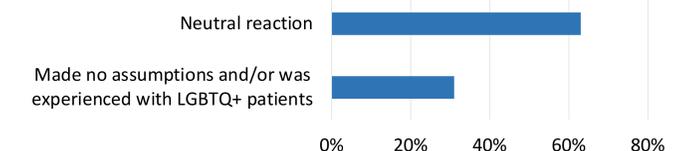
Findings:

- 3 themes to question 1 responses:
 1. Provider behaviors
 2. Increase in LGBTQ and allied providers
 3. Resources and access to care
- 2 themes to question 2 responses:
 1. Neutral reaction to disclosure
 2. Provider made no assumptions and/or was experienced with LGBTQ patients

Themes in Responses to Open-Ended Question 1: What factors would make you more comfortable seeking and/or receiving reproductive health care at UNC Campus Health?



Themes in Responses to Open-Ended Question 2: If you have told reproductive health care provider(s) at UNC Campus Health about your sexual orientation, please describe their reaction.



Discussion

- Participants agreed that reproductive health care providers at UNC Campus Health are approachable and LGBTQ-competent
- Signs of LGBTQ equality and gender-neutral language can help queer students trust the health care setting, view the setting as inclusive, and consider it safe to disclose sexual orientation, which is associated with positive health outcomes
- Queer students would feel more comfortable with reproductive health care if providers alter their behaviors (e.g., use gender-neutral language and provide care without assumptions of heterosexuality)
 - LGBTQ health competency training and the hiring of more LGBTQ and allied providers may help

Findings can be applied to reproductive health care at UNC Campus Health and other college health centers to provide more inclusive, competent care. This care is crucial to address LGBTQ health disparities and provide quality health care without barriers.

References

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