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# VNSNY Addresses Health Care Needs on Transgender Day of Visibility

Healthcare Providers Should Consider Both Clinical and Cultural Training to Reduce Discrimination



VNSNY, Community Contributor

Posted Thu, Mar 31, 2022



(Human Rights Campaign )

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It's Transgender Day of Visibility, an international event that is dedicated to recognizing the resilience and accomplishments of the transgender community. It's a day to celebrate the trans people amongst us, raise awareness about the struggles that they face, and advocate for more protected rights.

At [Visiting Nurse Service of New York \(VNSNY\)](#), one of the things that sets us apart from other healthcare providers is our commitment to providing culturally sensitive care that meets the diverse needs of the people we serve.

You may be asking yourself, "Shouldn't every healthcare provider share this commitment?" And that's a fair question. The unfortunate answer, however, is that many don't. In fact, the problem is so prevalent that there are people in the LGBTQ+ community who [avoid seeing healthcare](#) because of fear of discrimination and [uncomfortable encounters](#) with medical professionals.

While this issue is prevalent across the rainbow, the trans community has been hit especially hard. Many trans men and women would rather take a risk with their health than face being discriminated against by a healthcare professional. Trust is a key factor when seeking out gender-affirming providers, with most recommendations coming via word-of-mouth from other members of the trans community.

As the director of VNSNY's Gender Affirmation Surgery (GAS) program, I stress the importance of both clinical and cultural training. When our clinicians ask patients what their pronoun is, for example—some people prefer 'he' or 'she,' while others may prefer to be called 'they'—the patient understands right away that our caregivers know what they're doing, and trust begins to form.

Since the spring of 2016, VNSNY has trained more than 400 clinicians in caring for GAS patients, and those clinicians include nurses,

rehabilitation therapists, home health aides and social workers. The training program covers a cultural sensitivity component and a clinical component, in which the clinicians learn how to support the patient's surgical recovery.

I'm especially proud of the fact that we are fortunate enough to have a trans social worker on staff, Asia Lyons, who works closely with GAS patients as a social work care coordinator to help them through the entire process. The opportunity for our patients to speak with someone who has gone through similar procedures is remarkable, as it provides a personal level of insight and understanding that is impossible to replicate.

When Asia first calls her patients to introduce herself, she tells them right away that she is a trans woman, which brings them to tears because they are so thankful to have someone who truly understands what they are experiencing.

I had the opportunity to speak with Asia about her personal journey and how it impacts her work with GAS patients, and her insight is powerful.

### **How can healthcare providers better treat GAS patients?**

Asia: Education and preparation are key when caring for GAS patients. Part of my job is to make sure that the VNSNY nurses we are sending into the homes of GAS patients are trained by our [Gender Affirmation Program \(GAP\)](#). This way, the nurses are well prepared about what they should expect. They've seen post-op photos so they know what's normal vs. what requires medical attention. They understand complicated interpersonal dynamics and that there is a strong likelihood that trans patients may not have the support of family and friends.

### **How do you ensure that the needs of GAS patients are being met?**

Asia: We conduct a needs assessment with every GAS patient where we ask if they have enough food, if their bills are paid, and if they have sanitary supplies, and I provide supportive counseling to patients in distress. That's where GAP comes in. GAP is designed to address each patient's unique needs before they leave the hospital and to provide a safe space for them to recuperate fully at home.

**What advice would you give to trans patients who don't trust that they will receive compassionate care?**

Asia: Open your hearts and trust others when seeking out healthcare. You might find someone who is just what you needed for your journey. I know people who were forever changed just because they let others in. A lot of us grew up not caring for ourselves because we weren't cared for by others. By taking care of yourself, you stop the cycle of unintentional self-harm. You have a right to that.

*VNSNY is a leading provider of home health care services for transgender, non-binary, and gender nonconforming adults with our Gender Affirmation Program. VNSNY holds the SAGE Platinum LGBT cultural competency credential, and VNSNY's Gender Affirmation Program director received the 2018 HCA Award for Quality and Innovation. GAP is available in all five boroughs of New York City as well as Westchester and Nassau County and is covered by most insurance plans.*

*For more information about our services, or to refer a patient to the VNSNY Gender Affirmation Program, please call at [1-866-632-2557](tel:1-866-632-2557).*