

Medium

Riding the PRIDE 2020 Transgender Roller Coaster — With Pride



Shannon Whittington, RN, MSN, PCC C-LGBT Health

Jun 29 · 4 min read



For minority populations, the last month has been a roller coaster. On June 12, the Trump administration removed civil rights protections for transgender Americans in health care. The devastating regulation left people who are already vulnerable when it comes to health care — not to mention housing, employment and education — at further risk of discrimination, disenfranchisement and disconnection from care.

Then a week later came the surprising Supreme Court ruling conferring protection against discrimination in the workplace for LGBTQ+ people. Finally, a ruling that supports us. Do I dare hope that we are moving in the right direction?

The battle for racial justice has followed a similar pattern. The month began with the video revelation of George Floyd's murder at the hands of police — an all-too-familiar pattern. This was against the backdrop of the coronavirus pandemic, which disproportionately targets people of color and reminds us anew of the terrible inequities in our health care system.

But then something hopeful happened. Hundreds of thousands of people — of all races and across the world — poured into the streets to protest police brutality and affirm that black lives matter. When Riah Milton and Dominique Rem'mie Fells were killed during one week in June, protests expanded to affirm that black trans lives matter, too.

As we celebrate Pride Day at the end of a roller-coaster Pride Month, we have a lot to be proud of, from marriage equality and the recent Supreme Court ruling to a new generation living out and proud. But we have a lot still to fight for. As a reminder, it was *just two weeks ago* that the Trump administration ruled that trans people are not covered by the Affordable Care Act's protection against discrimination. In these turbulent times, we must remain attentive and active, keep raising our voices every day and at every turn, to affirm that those of us living on the margins truly matter.

I am proud to work at an organization that puts that affirmation at the center of its mission. For 127 years, the [Visiting Nurse Service of New York](#) has provided progressive care to the most vulnerable New Yorkers right where they need it most, in their own homes and communities. We were founded to treat those too often left out of care — beginning with new immigrants at the turn of the last century — and we have been on the front lines of every public health crisis since, including the 1918 Spanish Flu, the AIDS crisis, 9/11 and now COVID-19.

I am also proud to direct a program that provides affirming home care for post-operative transgender patients. We've cared for nearly 600 trans patients in all five boroughs and Westchester and Nassau Counties, and our [SelectHealth](#) health plan covers all necessary gender affirmation surgeries.

I am proud to be part of a health care workforce that sees people in the full context of their lives — in their homes, as opposed to clinics or doctors' offices — and so can make sure that all members of society have access to the physical, emotional and social supports they need and deserve. VNSNY proudly holds Platinum certification in LGBT cultural sensitivity from SAGE across our entire organization. As an outgrowth of VNSNY's mission to make health care as inclusive as possible, we are mobilizing internally, too. We created an LGBTQ+ Employees Resource Group to address the needs of LGBTQ+ employees, and, more recently, formed a Transgender Task Force. When the VNSNY Anti-Racism Employee Advisory Group held its first meeting over Zoom last week, 77 staff members dialed in.

I know what it means to have to affirm who you are every day. Many years ago, I worked at an organization where I didn't feel comfortable being identified as gay. When I left that organization for another, where I felt free to live my life fully and embrace my identity, the difference was so liberating that it fuels my commitment each day to make sure no one feels marginalized. Public health is all about responding to the times and finding a better way forward. It is all about reaching people who might otherwise be overlooked, making sure they are counted and have access to care that keeps them safe and liberates them to live their lives fully. If that's how this unprecedented Pride month comes to a close, it will be one we can truly be proud of.