Balancing Work, Family, and School

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A New Grad in the Hospice Setting
Using the Kawa Model for Self-Assessment
Addressing LGBTQ+ Issues With Occupational Therapy Clients

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What Occupational Therapy Practitioners and Educators Can Do

Many resources are available to help health care practitioners and educators improve their LGBTQ+ cultural competence. In person cultural competency trainings (also known as diversity trainings, sensitivity trainings, or LGBTQ+ trainings) designed for health care settings and schools are available in many areas. Additionally, the National LGBTQ Health Education Center (www.lgbthealtheducation.org) offers clinicians free online interactive learning modules and webinars, as well as many other helpful resources. Practitioners and educators are encouraged to seek this education and to invite trainers to their workplace to help all staff improve their LGBTQ+ cultural competence.

Other ways to make practices and communities more LGBTQ+ friendly include the following:

Inclusive Paperwork

Paperwork that allows clients to choose a first name that may be different from their legal name, pronouns, gender identity, gender assigned at birth (physiological sex), and sexual orientation allows all clients to disclose as much or as little information about their identities as they see fit. The Fenway Institute patient forms are excellent examples of what inclusive paperwork can look like, and can be found at https://fbi.ly/2MYOY9UC.

Q Cards

If you are unable to change the paperwork used at your practice, using Q Cards is recommended. Q Cards, designed to fit in a wallet, allow clients to discretely tell health care providers about their sexual orientation, gender identity, and other important sensitive information. Practitioners can keep these in their clinics and make them available to clients. For more information, visit www.qcardproject.com.

Environmental Cues

Practitioners can help foster an inclusive atmosphere through signage and symbols in their workplaces, such as brochures on LGBTQ+ health topics; signs indicating non-discriminatory policies, including sexual orientation and gender identity; and symbols of LGBTQ+ safety, such as a rainbow flag or a sticker that indicates all are welcome. A small sign can make a big difference in how safe your LGBTQ+ clients feel in your office.

Conclusion

One of the defining traits of occupational therapy practitioners is their commitment to respecting and treating every client as a whole person. Practitioners should recognize that identity and orientation are considerable pieces of the whole. Because sexual orientation and gender identity affect all occupations, occupational therapy practitioners who are educated on health disparities and the culture of LGBTQ+ communities are best equipped to serve these clients effectively.

References


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Perspectives

Occupational therapy’s scope of practice intersects with numerous concerns of LGBTQ+ individuals. Many LGBTQ+ individuals have reported negative interactions because of cultural insensitivity among clinicians. Many avoid seeking necessary health care services for fear of receiving inadequate or insensitive care, which exacerbates the health disparities they often face (Fenway Institute, 2013). LGBTQ+ patients also frequently find themselves educating health care practitioners on their medical needs because of a lack of providers educated on LGBTQ+ health issues (Shimkus, 2015).

This article provides some background on LGBTQ+ clients’ occupational needs.

ADRs

Self-expression through appearance can be of great importance to LGBTQ+ people; especially transgender individuals. Clothing, hair, and makeup are nearly universal and important for some people; others, appearance as a means of identity expression is paramount and should not be taken lightly.

For transgender people, dressing may include items that alter the appearance of primary or secondary sex characteristics, such as a gaff (a compressive underwear that minimizes the appearance of the penis and testes) or a binder (a compressive underwear that flattens the chest). Although medical necessity may dictate what clients can wear, clinicians should keep in mind that identity confirming clothing may be extremely important for individuals who express their identity through appearance.

The safety and availability of public restrooms can have a serious effect on toileting for transgender people. The lack of safe public restrooms results in high rates of dehydration, urinary tract infections, and kidney infections for many (Herman, 2013). When working with a client with widespread lack of cultural competence education among health care providers. Many LGBTQ+ individuals have reported negative interactions because of cultural insensitivity among clinicians. Many avoid seeking necessary health care services for fear of receiving inadequate or insensitive care, which exacerbates the health disparities they often face (Fenway Institute, 2013). LGBTQ+ patients also frequently find themselves educating health care practitioners on their medical needs because of a lack of providers educated on LGBTQ+ health issues (Shimkus, 2015).

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