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## **For Immediate Release**

### ***MCHD public health nurses take course in LGBTQ+ Safe Zone training***

**MORGANTOWN, WV** (Nov. 17, 2021) — Visiting a health care provider can be nerve-racking for anyone, but members of the LGBTQ+ community often face additional challenges, noted Brad Grimes, program director at the LGBTQ+ Center at West Virginia University.

“Many LGBTQ+ people report having negative interactions with providers when seeking care, such as being refused care or being blamed for one’s health status,” he said.

He has heard stories such as health-care providers sometimes refusing to touch patients or using excessive precautions. These patients sometimes hear harsh or abusive language or are treated physically roughly or abusively.

And sometimes the providers are simply not up-to-date on important facets of LGBTQ care.

In an effort to provide updated, inclusive care, Monongalia County Health Department’s public health nurses teamed up with Grimes to undergo LGBTQ+ Safe Zone training.

Grimes conducted the training via Zoom. Topics covered ranged from inclusivity, transgender health care and preferred pronouns.

“We offer Safe Zone trainings so that people can be equipped with the knowledge and tools that are needed to combat discrimination toward a vulnerable population that, absent those impediments, can make great contributions to our schools, workplaces and society,” Grimes said.

“I was pleased to be presenting to such an eager group of people who were excited to learn about LGBTQ+ inclusion and health care disparities.”

Monica Cutlip, a nurse at MCHD Clinical Services, was an active participant in Grimes’ presentation. She asked questions about how she and her staff can provide better care for LGBTQ+ patients.

“We are committed to making all our patients feel welcome,” Cutlip said. “We want this to be a safe, comfortable, nonjudgmental environment.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Journal of Public Health, members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) community are at risk for a number of health concerns when compared to their heterosexual peers.

“We need health-care providers who are trained in the LGBTQ+ community’s specific needs and health disparities so that the community can feel safe, respected and well cared for by the clinicians providing them services,” Grimes said.

Created in 2013, the Safe Zone Project ([thesafezoneproject.com](http://thesafezoneproject.com)) provides online resources to educate teachers and the general public on issues regarding the LGBTQ+ community.

Stigma and discrimination against LGBTQ+ people can affect how often they may seek care, as well as the quality of care they receive.

“This experience really opened our eyes to the inequalities people face, especially people who don’t feel safe getting health care,” Cutlip said. “That shocked me.”

Said Grimes: “A number of health care disparities exist for members of the LGBTQ+ community and, too often, fear of discrimination, bias or poor treatment keep them from obtaining health care as often as they need it.”

LGBTQ+ people are less likely to have health insurance than non-LGBTQ+ people, another reason why they are less likely to seek health care, according to both Grimes and information on the CDC’s website.

MCHD Clinical Services offers free testing for STI’s and HIV, for which gay and transgender people are at higher risk.

Also, while transgender people identify with a gender different from the one assigned to them at birth, there are still certain health precautions they should take. For instance, transgender men should still take advantage of the reproductive health services at MCHD Clinical Services.

“Reproductive health is important for all genders. No matter your gender, if you are assigned female at birth, you should have a pap smear,” Cutlip said. “We understand it can be frightening. We will work with you to make sure you are safe and comfortable.”

Transgender people are also at risk for cancer in the reproductive organs and should be screened.

And when they do arrive for their appointments at MCHD Clinical Services, they should feel comfortable knowing that their visit is confidential.

“Some people don’t feel that their privacy is always protected at the doctor’s office. We are committed to making sure your privacy is protected when you come here,” Cutlip said.

Patients at MCHD Clinical Services are not required to provide insurance, so no private information will be forwarded to the insurance holder.

MCHD Clinical Services has also begun asking for preferred pronouns when patients register.

“Some people even write ‘Thanks for asking’ on the form when we ask them their pronouns. I think it really makes a difference,” Cutlip said about the recent change.

Some LGBTQ+ people use gender pronouns they may not have been assigned at birth, including the singular “they/them” pronoun that can be used as a gender-neutral option.

“The simple act of sharing one’s name and pronouns can be a profoundly inclusive act,” Grimes said. “When done in a health-care setting, this goes a long way to help alleviate mistrust and concerns about not receiving compassionate care. It helps members of these communities feel seen, safe and respected.”

MCHD staff has begun wearing pins indicating their own pronouns and other messaging so patients can feel more comfortable sharing their own.

Cutlip noted she and her team have greatly benefited from this training and they are committed to continue learning more.

“I’ve always considered us to be an inclusive, safe, nonjudgmental place, and we will keep educating ourselves to make sure we’re providing the best care possible,” Cutlip said. “

While it can be difficult to keep up with inclusive language, it is important to continue learning, noted Grimes.

“Terminology continues to change. Best practices get updated or change. We all must keep learning and growing, so that we can be the best allies possible and reduce stigma and discrimination,” Grimes said.

MCHD staff want the health department to be known as a safe space for all LGBTQ+ people seeking inclusive health care.

“Based on their desire to learn and the level of engagement that I witnessed from the MCHD Clinical Services team, I believe they are a safe option for members of the queer community seeking clinical services,” Grimes said.

For up-to-date information on health and wellness in Monongalia County, check out [monchd.org](http://monchd.org) and follow the health department on Facebook, Twitter and TikTok @WVMCHD and on Instagram at [wvmchd](https://www.instagram.com/wvmchd).

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