Human Sexuality and Healthcare

October 2, 2007
Wayne Bockmon, MD

• Straight Americans need... an education of the heart and soul. They must understand - to begin with - how it can feel to spend years denying your own deepest truths, to sit silently through classes, meals, and church services while people you love toss off remarks that brutalize your soul. ~Bruce Bawer, The Advocate, 28 April 1998
• Why can't they have gay people in the army? Personally, I think they are just afraid of a thousand guys with M16s going, "Who'd you call a faggot?"
~John Stewart

Definitions

• Same sex behavior
• Same sex orientation
Lexicon of Human Sexuality

- Homosexual
- Heterosexual
- Gay
- Lesbian
- Straight
- Bisexual
- Queer
- GLBT
- Intersex
- Sexual Minorities
- MSM
- Heteroflexible
- Metrosexual
- Questioning

Incidence of Sexual Diversity

- Best measures suggest that roughly 4 to 5 percent of men and about 2 percent of women are exclusively gay or lesbian
- One third or more of all people report some same-sex sexual experience. Bisexuality is relatively more common in women
- Cultural attitudes toward homosexuality affect sexual behavior but not incidence of orientation
- Transgendered persons account for less than 1%
• Bisexuality immediately doubles your chances for a date on Saturday night.\/~Woody Allen
Who are we?

- Beyond stereotypes
  - Behavior / Appearance
  - Partnership status
  - Parenthood

What causes homosexuality

- The American Academy of Pediatrics has stated, "Sexual orientation probably is not determined by any one factor but by a combination of genetic, hormonal, and environmental influences."
- The American Psychological Association has stated that "there are probably many reasons for a person's sexual orientation and the reasons may be different for different people". However, it states that for most people, sexual orientation is determined at an early age.
**Twin studies**

- **Twin studies** give indications that male homosexuality is genetically mediated. One common type of **twin study** compares the monozygotic (or *identical*) *twins* of people possessing a particular trait to the dizygotic (non-identical, or *fraternal*) twins of people possessing the trait. Bailey and Pillard (1991) in a study of gay twins found that 52% of monozygotic brothers and 22% of the dizygotic twins were concordant for homosexuality. Bailey, Dunne and Martin (2000) used the Australian twin registry to obtain a sample of 4,901 twins.

**Biological differences in Homosexuals**

- Brain structural differences
- Pheromone responses
- Handedness
- Response to SSRIs
- Verbal fluency
- Object location memory
- Functioning of inner ear and central auditory system
- Hair whorl
- Finger length
- Number of older brothers
Childhood Gender Non-conformity

- Careful studies of young children show that boys with highly feminine traits frequently become adult homosexuals.
- 70% of adult gays and lesbians report having felt different from same sex peers as children.

Animal Studies

- Homosexual behavior has been identified in over 450 different kinds of animals worldwide.
Psychology of Homosexuality

• No evidence exists linking psychopathology and homosexuality or bisexuality
• The Hooker study in 1957 compared homosexual and heterosexual men matched for age, IQ, and education. Standard projective tests were administered to both groups

• No differences were found in scores for psychological adjustment
• These results have been replicated in many other studies since
• In 1973 homosexuality was removed the DSM as a disorder
Professional position statements

- American Academy of Pediatrics
- American Counseling Association
- American Medical Association
- American Psychiatric Association
- American Psychological Association
- National Association of Social Workers

Religion and Homosexuality

- Most churches and synagogues have adopted a policy of acceptance or tolerance toward homosexuals
- A small minority of extreme conservatives dominate the debate, but do not represent the majority
- Many gays and lesbians participate in religious systems in which they are accepted
Religion and Homosexuality

- The Bible contains six admonishments to homosexuals and 362 admonishments to heterosexuals. That doesn't mean that God doesn't love heterosexuals. It's just that they need more supervision. ~Lynn Lavner

Homosexuality and the Law

- Lawrence vs Texas
- June 26, 2003
- Justice Kennedy wrote “the justices decided that adult human beings have a right to enter into consensual intimate relationships, and held that because this is a right, they should not and cannot be punished for the choices they make.”
GLBT community and Healthcare

- Access
- Discrimination
- Abuse
- Partnership rights

Access

- Obtaining insurance
- Partnership benefits
Discrimination

- Passive - routine care discouraged due to provider discomfort
- Active - Denial of services based on bias

Abuse

- Verbal / emotional
- Physical
Case #1

- 34 y/o gay male who tested HIV in a private physician’s office
- Told by the physician that HIV was God’s punishment for being gay and that accepting Jesus was the first step in managing his HIV disease

Case #2

- 38 y/o gay woman whose partner had died of cancer a few years ago
- Now single, not sexually active
- Dedicated to homeless animals
- Told by her physician that she still had time to follow God’s will, get married and have children.
- Told she was wasting her life
Case #3

- 41 y/o gay man, HIV positive
- Deep cut to his foot, requiring suturing
- Three different emergency rooms or clinics refused
- The wound had to be managed open and resulted in a complicated recovery

Case #4

- 54 y/o gay woman sent for routine Pap and pelvic exam
- She is post menopausal and not sexually active
- The physician chose a speculum that was inappropriate
- The exam was very painful and she sustained vaginal trauma
**Case #5**

- 24 y/o gay man with anal condylomata
- Sent to proctologist for surgical removal
- The procedure was done in the office
- He was sent out without oral pain meds
- When the local anesthesia wore off he was in extreme pain
- When I spoke to the surgeon he stated that “maybe the kid would think about what he had up there”.

**Case #6**

- 52 y/o gay man with a perirectal swelling and right inguinal adenopathy
- Punch biopsy showed squamous carcinoma
- Sent to colo-rectal surgeon who elected not to do surgery but treat topically
- The mass enlarged over the following weeks
- A second opinion evaluation revealed stage 4 disease
- He lived 18 months
Partnership rights

- Even with legal documentation, unmarried persons can have difficulty exercising healthcare decisions for a disabled partner
- Same sex partners can find themselves left out of the process at the most critical time of their partner’s life

Health Issues for GLBT patients

- Screening - undiagnosed illness
- Mental health / substance abuse
- Inequality in the aggressiveness of care
The Healthcare of Sexual Minorities

History and Physical Intake Form

- Should be free of heterosexual assumptions
- Include gender neutral terms such as “partner”
- Under “sex” include third category for transsexual
- Forms should include a statement as to manner of confidentiality
**Patient Interview**

- Ensure questions are open ended and apply to all patients
- Be non judgmental in taking a sexual history
- Focus on behavior not orientation or gender identity
- If a patient seems bothered by a line of questioning, simply apologize and explain why the information is important for optimum care

- Seek out colleagues who have experience in GLBT care and use them for advice
- Explain how confidentiality will be protected
- If a teenager or young person does disclose his or her sexual orientation or transgender identity to you, treat this information with great privacy and respect.
- You may be the first person he or she has told. As sexual minority young people are at increased risk for suicide and abuse, pay special attention to the mental health of this patient. Ask about the patient’s access to support
• If you are a pediatrician seeing a child with same sex parents, include both in discussions about the child’s health care even if both do not have legal custody. Health is compromised when any primary care giver is excluded.

Avoiding Assumptions About Sexuality in Healthcare
• Avoid the assumption that patients are heterosexual just because they haven't told you otherwise. It may take time for them to trust you.
• Avoid the assumption that a patient with children is heterosexual
• Avoid the assumption that a gay man’s health issues revolve around sexuality, STDs or AIDS. Consider all possible diagnoses as you would with any patient.

Take Home Message

• Sexual diversity is the norm, not the exception
• Sexual behavior impacts health
• Remember the difference between behavior and labels
• If you don’t ask, you probably won’t be told
Professional neutrality

- Gender
- Sexual orientation
- Religion
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Age
- Class

Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind. ~ Dr. Seuss