HIV Experts: Clinicians Need Better, More Diverse Sex Ed

The training would include accurate information for people affected by HIV of all genders, sexualities and races to gain patients' trust.

April 29, 2021 By Heather Boerner

Should all clinicians be trained in how to talk to patients about HIV, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and just sex in general in a community-specific way? Yes, according to a group of HIV clinicians, sexual health experts and advocates.

The Center for HIV Law and Policy convened the experts, which included representatives of the American Academy of HIV Medicine (AAHIVM), GMHC, the advocacy group Prevention Access Campaign, Callen-Lorde Health Center, the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care, the National Coalition of STD Directors, the New York Transgender Advocacy Group and VOCAL-NY, who came together specifically to urge the passage of New York State Bill A3864. The bill would require health care providers to receive sexual health training in order to keep their licenses current. The hope is that it will help providers address patients' distrust of the medical system.

If passed, the bill could be the first in the nation to require such training, which would include accurate information about care for people marginalized by racial, gender and sexuality discrimination, among other disparities.

The call for action comes at a time when health care providers—even within the HIV world—report that they hesitate to discuss the reality of antiretroviral treatment to prevent transmission of HIV (known as Undetectable Equals Untransmittable, or U=U). The drumbeat for clear communication of the science is growing from experts and community members alike, even as evidence shows that medical distrust affects people's access to medical care, including HIV prevention and treatment.

"Health care providers have an important role to play [in ending the HIV epidemic]," said Michelle Collins-Ogle, MD, of Children's Hospital at Montefiore and AAHIVM. "The better educated we are, the better we can provide care, the more welcome kids from the LGBTQ community and young adults will feel coming into our health care system."

Education is also key to providing patient-centered care that welcomes the full human experience of all patients, said Marquise Vilsón, a member of GMHC's board of directors.

“As long as health care professionals are not learning to understand all of the communities that are affected by HIV—their needs, their behaviors, their potential risks for exposure to HIV and STIs—there will continue to be increases in HIV and STIs amongst these populations,” he said.

Click here to watch the full press conference.

Click here to read more about HIV and U=U.

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