

Improving healthcare encounters and reducing healthcare disparities in lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults: The role of the nurse

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One method of reducing the health disparities experienced by the lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) community includes addressing the potential underlying determinants that occur during the clinical encounter. Influential determinants include patient-provider communication and environmental factors. The reason to focus on these determinants in LGB young adults is multi factorial. First, LGB individuals are at risk for depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and suicidality. Second, LGB adults demonstrate risk behaviors that include cigarette smoking, alcohol and drug use, and high-risk sexual activity. Studies show that many of these risk behaviors begin in late adolescence and early adulthood. Third, LGB young adults deal with the burden of social stigma and societal disapproval associated with their sexual orientation, which may contribute to their decision to delay seeking healthcare. Lastly, the process of negotiating healthy adult relationships, including those with healthcare providers, may be challenging for the young adult who is trying to hide his or her sexual preferences. Nurses play a vital role in helping healthcare providers and LGB young adults engage in culturally sensitive healthcare encounters, which, in turn may reduce negative long-term health consequences. This is because nurses are often the first professionals welcoming the patient into the healthcare environment and have the ability to model culturally appropriate behavior to patients and other healthcare professionals. Based on findings from this study, the nurse will be able to identify interventions to promote a positive healthcare encounter for the LGB young adult and consider strategies to improve personal competence when working with the LGB population.

Biography

Caitlin M. Stover is a registered nurse who obtained her Ph.D. in Nursing from the University of Massachusetts Worcester, a master's degree in Community/Public Health from Worcester State University and a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Boston College. She is an assistant Professor in the Community Health Department in the College of Nursing at University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. She holds current certifications as a Public Health Clinical Nurse Specialist and as a Certified Nurse Educator. Her research explores the healthcare experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals.

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