

Medical Schools Neglecting Gay Health Needs, Study Says

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Medical school curricula in the United States and Canada devote an average of only five hours to the specific health care issues faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender patients, a Stanford University School of Medicine survey shows.

The study, published Wednesday in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, asked deans at 176 medical schools in the United States and Canada to rate the quality and quantity of gay-related health care education at their respective programs. According to the results, students at one-third of responding medical schools received no such training in their clinical years.

Only three in five schools provided instruction in eight or more of 16 health issues of particular concern to lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people, including sex reassignment surgery, inaccessibility of healthcare, safer sex and chronic disease. Just 8.3 percent taught all 16 subjects. Particularly low scorers were topics of relevance to transgender patients, like body image and transitioning.

According to the researchers, the failure to include these topics in medical school curricula exposes patients to significant health problems. Cervical cancer and Genital human papillomavirus often go untreated in lesbians, for example, while rates of hepatitis remain high among gay men. Transgender individuals who resort to unprescribed hormones while in the process of changing their sex risk infection and other side effects.

Over all, 44 percent of schools ranked their education in this area as “fair.” The survey response rate of 85 percent, however, and the reported interest in hiring qualified faculty may indicate that medical schools see a need to improve. A full 97 percent of schools reported training future doctors to ask patients if they “have sex with men, women, or both” when taking a sexual history, which represents a step forward, the study’s authors said. The survey was conducted by the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Medical Education Research Group at Stanford’s School of Medicine.

REBECCA APPEL

— <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/12/world/americas/12iht-educBriefs12.html>