

Make Your Office Welcoming for Lesbian Patients

Post a nondiscrimination policy, but also note that patients' confidentiality is respected and protected.

BY HEIDI SPLETE
Senior Writer

MIAMI — A few changes can make a practice more welcoming to lesbian patients, Dr. Christy Isler said at the annual meeting of the American College of Preventive Medicine.

Being mindful and inclusive in words and actions (as well as reminding your staff to do likewise) can go a long way toward helping patients feel comfortable, while also boosting the likelihood that they'll return for regular visits, said Dr. Isler, who is an ob.gyn. and maternal-fetal medicine specialist at East Carolina University in Greenville, N.C.

Dr. Isler offered the following advice:
► Don't presume a person's sexuality based on appearance, demeanor, or pro-

fession. Revise forms to include options for "partnered" in addition to the usual choices of single, married, divorced, or widowed. Use terms such as "partner's name" rather than "spouse's name."

Make sure the partner's name is on the patient's information form, because that partner may be the emergency contact for that patient.

► Post a nondiscrimination policy where all patients can see it. But also note that patients' confidentiality on all health issues is respected and protected.

► Ask patients whether they are sexually active with men, with women, or with both.

► Ask an individual about her partner the same way you would ask any woman how her family is doing. Remember that for many lesbian patients, their partners are

their chosen families, and they may have little or no relationship with their biological families.

► Remember that a regular visit for a lesbian patient includes the same preventive medicine issues as for any other female patient: diet, exercise, alcohol use, smok-

ing, reproductive issues, and domestic violence.

► Be aware of a possible increased risk of psychological problems among lesbians. Ask about stress levels and refer for additional help as needed to address mental and emotional health issues. ■

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