LGBT Access to Primary Care Health Services
SURVEY 2010

1. Background
NHS Oxfordshire is a member of the Homophobia Awareness Liaison Team (HALT) and over the last three years HALT have conducted a survey at the Oxfordshire PRIDE event. Last year a small minority of respondents (less than 10 per cent) indicated that they had experienced difficulty when accessing primary health services which they felt may have been because of their sexuality. HALT coordinated a ‘critical friend’ workshop to look at possible issues and one of the actions that came out of the workshop was to conduct this survey.

We wanted to find out more about the experience people from Oxfordshire’s LGBT community have when accessing primary health services in Oxfordshire. We therefore ran a survey which people could access at our stall at the annual Oxford Pride event, on the HALT website and on our website. All information received will be treated in confidence and will help us to target training to improve people’s experience of accessing primary care services in Oxfordshire.

2. Summary
All respondents were registered with a GP and 79 per cent rated the service they receive from their GPs as good or excellent. Seventy Four per cent thought their GP was sensitive to their needs as an LGBT person however, only 57 per cent said that their GP was aware of their sexuality. The main reasons given for their GP being unaware was that it had never arisen in consultations or they had never been asked. Lack of support or access to appropriate services for transgender people was raised by nearly 10 per cent of respondents.

3. Statistics
There were a total of 42 responses.

- The majority of respondents, 71 per cent, live in Oxford City, 17 per cent in North Oxfordshire, and 12 per cent from South and West Oxfordshire.
- Over half, 67 per cent of respondents, were under 35.
- Ninety per cent of respondents identified themselves as LGBT or experiencing same sex relationships.
- Of the people who responded to the survey 21 per cent identified themselves as lesbian, 30 per cent as gay, 27 per cent as bisexual, 3 per cent as transgender and 18 per cent as ‘other’.
- All respondents were registered with a GP.
- Ninety three per cent of respondents identified their GP practice.
- More than half, 57 per cent, said that their GP was aware of their sexuality.
- Just under three quarters, 74 per cent, thought that their GP was sensitive to their needs as an LGBT person.
- Seventy nine per cent of respondents rated the services they receive from their GP as either good or excellent.
- Five per cent rated the service from their GP as poor.
- Over half, 62 per cent, rated Oxfordshire’s health services as being good or excellent.
Twenty nine per cent of respondents rated the health service in Oxfordshire as satisfactory or neutral and just under 10 per cent rated it as poor.

4. Comments
Some questions asked for further comments or explanations.

Is your GP aware of your sexuality?
Of the 43 per cent of respondents who said their GP was not aware of their sexuality reasons given included:

- Never arisen in consultations, never asked
- Not relevant to symptoms
- I haven’t had any need to mention it
- My Mum wouldn’t approve
- Insurance
- I don’t really know…there is always anxiety as an LGBT person to bring up your status especially in a situation where someone has power over you and you do not know how they are going to react

Do you think your GP is sensitive to your needs as an LGBT person?
The majority of people, 74 per cent, felt their GP was sensitive additional comments included:

- My GP is excellent. I can talk to her without any inhibition on issues relating to sexual health and my mental health which I am troubled by. She is very knowledgeable and has never hesitated to see me if she thinks I need to be seen urgently or indeed to refer me to another health care service.
- My GP tried to understand issues he isn’t certain of and is quick and efficient to [my needs].
- They are very good/understanding/friendly.
- My mental health issues are treated very sensibly, sensitively and are of priority.
- He started me on my transgender journey.

Of those who said that their GP was not sensitive to their needs comments include:

- The surgery has no info geared towards LGBTs.
- The GP has not made any effort to inquire about my status as an LGBT person, so I have no information.
- Absence of discussion is de facto assumption of heterosexuality, this is in itself oppressive.
- One respondent was not happy with the support they had received from their GP in assisting them with the medical aspect of their female to male transition.

Do you have any comments about health services or GP services in Oxfordshire, good or bad, that you would like to share with us?
Seventeen people gave comments here as outlined below

General

- I think the standard of medical care is excellent. I think my GP is very helpful and good at helping me manage my long-term condition and I think the sexual health services I have accessed have been accessible and helpful. However, the outpatient clinic I attend is very poor at patient management and support.
- It amazes me that [my practice] has not thought to recruit more GPs as they seem very busy.
- Stop cutting nurses – they are short of staff and have to work harder
- Receptionists aren’t very friendly.
- Very judgemental.
- Really good sex education at GUM clinic.
• Not enough support regarding smoking cessation from individual GPs.
• I would like GPs to be better educated about talking with sensitivity to LGBT people e.g. not making assumptions, using non-judgemental language. The varieties of lifestyles meant by LGBT words. Sexual Health needs.
• Little time spent with patient.
• I think the care I have received in Oxford has been generally good with one poor experience. However, I would appreciate it if NHS staff do not always assume one is heterosexual which means one is always having to ‘out’ oneself.
• Bucks mental health services are better than Oxfordshire.

Transgender / Transsexual
• I hear of too many problems by trans and gender queer people accessing their necessary treatment.
• The waiting time for funding for appointments – I’m currently awaiting an appointment at Charing Cross Gender identity Clinic. I’ve been waiting since February for an answer to say if my appointment will be funded.
• There are no services for smear tests, STD checks, breast screening and other check ups needed by any person with female reproductive organs that are sensitive towards the particular needs of trans men and otherwise gender variant women.
• Lack of transgender support.

Scope of survey
• The scope of this survey really is very limited. Why does it only focus on GPs? What about the Trust’s lack of representation of LGBTs in its printed and online materials? For example when registering to take part in this survey, the section ‘Taking Part’ mentioned BME health issues but no mention of LGBTs. There is an appalling lack of sensitivity to the requirements of local LGBT health users on these kinds of issues (visibility, accurate terminology, specific and explicit representation, LGBT specific sexual health campaigns, engagement with the wider community and proactive encouragement of local LGBTs to seek appropriate medical services such as hepatitis vaccination for gay men and men who have sex with men (especially students). I think a survey that goes under the banner of ‘LGBT access to primary care health services’ really should be broaching all these topics.

NB: Not all comments are included in full to protect patient confidentiality

5. What Next
• This report of the findings will be shared with HALT to discuss ways of addressing and resolving the issues raised in the responses.
• The results and recommendations from HALT will be discussed within the PCT and shared with GPs and with other health partners to improve and develop primary care services for LGBT people.
• We will use the results and comments during our Equality and Diversity training to ensure that our staff are sensitive to the needs of LGBT people in all aspects of their work.
• This summary findings document will be shared with those individuals who completed the survey and asked to be kept informed about the results.

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