

Creating a Welcoming Environment for LGBTQ+ Inclusivity



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The initial visit to the fertility clinic is an anxiety provoking experience for the heterosexual couple who has been unsuccessful trying to conceive on their own. Fertility testing and treatment coverage challenges make this journey a daunting task. Emotional support for the couple may be found online or in-person. The conversations with family, friends and healthcare providers are often difficult however, in general, there are more resources readily available to the typical heterosexual couple presenting for evaluation. Representation of the couple can be easily found throughout the office from décor, marketing materials, intake forms and terminology used by all clinical staff.

This, however, is not the case for all LGBTQ+ patients seeking fertility evaluation and treatment. Historically LGBTQ+ persons have suffered stigma and discrimination in many aspects of their lives with healthcare being no exception. Bias and lack of respect or support compounded by their need for reproductive services creates an opportunity to change the perception of healthcare. Healthcare providers,

clinical and non-clinical staff need to embrace the cultural competence necessary for providing exceptional patient care for LGBTQ+ patients. These patients are diverse in race, ethnicity, education, and socioeconomic status in addition to gender identity and sexual orientation.

Equal care for all patients is at the core of reproductive healthcare but may not be readily seen in the culture of the provider's practice. Ongoing LGBTQ+ inclusivity training and practice assessment for barriers elevates care for all patients. Training should include a discussion on implicit bias, perceived societal norms, understanding gender identity and sexual orientation as well as inclusive language. One time training is not as effective as recurring discussions to assess the successes and mistakes made in patient care. Active participation in local events should be encouraged. Patients are inspired when their REI practice is visible at community events promoting LGBTQ+ family building. Resources to support their LGBTQ+ patient's family building journey, both financially and emotionally, will provide nurses with valuable tools that they need to enhance educational encounters with the patients they serve. However, it is not the exclusive role of the nurses but collaborative efforts by the entire practice to ensure that LGBTQ+ inclusion is fully implemented, recognized, and appreciated in order to elevate the reputation of the practice, and above all, improve the patient experience.