Advancing Care for Sexual & Gender Minority Students in Oregon School Health Centers: A Needs Assessment

Amika C. Savage, DNP, FNP-BC, CHES
Jonathan Soffer, DNP, ANP, OHSU Chair

Adolescence is the period between childhood and adulthood, sometimes defined as ages 10-19. In the United States, an estimated 9.5% of adolescents, more than 2.5 million people, identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT). The umbrella term sexual and gender minority (SGM) encompasses LGBT identities as well as other sexual and gender minorities, such as queer, gender nonbinary, gender nonconforming, pansexual, asexual, and intersex, among others.

School Health Centers (SHCs), sometimes called Student Health Centers, are community resources that provide health services in close proximity to a school. SHCs have many benefits including:

- Increasing health equity by reducing cultural, familial, language, and financial barriers to care
- Decreasing health care costs among their users, including emergency department visits and prescription drug use
- Improving student academic and health outcomes

All Multnomah County SHC clinic personnel were asked to participate in a voluntary, anonymous, and web-based survey. Participating protections included:

- Anonymity of the survey
- Secure storage of survey responses
- Mandatory informed consent for all participants
- Oversight from OHSU’s Institutional Review Board and the Multnomah County Health Department’s Research Review Team

Survey Instrument

The survey aimed to assess the knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, behaviors, and recommendations of respondents through dichotomous, multiple-choice, Likert scale, and open-ended questions.

Results

Findings suggest that persons with higher SGM knowledge are more likely to have SGM-supportive attitudes and beliefs. This relationship is well-established in the literature and strengthens support for conducting educational initiatives to benefit SGM patients. The most frequently reported barrier to providing SGM-affirming care was a lack of related knowledge. The most reported recommendation for improving SGM patient care was to implement a training initiative.

Recommendations

- Initiate training programs to increase the SGM-related knowledge of Multnomah County SHC clinic personnel and to support the delivery of SGM-affirming care
- Conduct additional large-sample, multi-site, randomized investigations, including the collection of feedback from SGM patients