

self advocacy guide



INGERSOLL GENDER CENTER

www.ingersollgendercenter.org

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BACKGROUND

In our 2018 Healthcare Access Survey we found that 56% of our local trans community felt uncomfortable in asking about their rights in their providers office, or are unsure about their rights in a medical setting. Conversely, our community commented during this process that they often do not trust their medical providers; and some even feel a level of fear around their current or past experiences with medical professionals due to past transphobic abuse, harassment, discrimination, and even assault in their providers office. For our trans communities of color these experiences with transphobia were often racialized.

We want to support our community in mitigating these issues by providing a self advocacy tool kit in addition to strategies to accessing care, and questions to ask their providers in order to make sure that they are receiving the care that they need & deserve.

LOOKING FOR A PROVIDER

Looking for a provider is one of the most important things you will do while attempting to access healthcare. Your medical provider is one of the few people at any time that you will trust with your body and your healthcare needs. However, it is the experience of the trans community and other communities that intersect within the trans identity that we cannot always trust our medical care providers.

A FEW THINGS HAPPEN WHEN WE DO NOT TRUST OUR MEDICAL PROVIDERS:

We hide information about our health or concerns.

You may be asking: Why should you share details about your experiences, or symptoms, or pain when you are unsure about being believed, or that your behaviors may be pathologized, or that they may make assumptions about who you are as a person and discriminate against you?

We don't ask questions that could help us understand important medical treatments, procedures, or processes.

You may be asking: Why should you ask questions to clarify when your provider doesn't attempt to speak to you about your health in terms that you can understand, or they make you feel small or unintelligent for asking?

We put off, or refuse to seek the care that we need even if it may be detrimental to our health.

You may be asking: Why should I go in to the Dr. I am just going to end up feeling a lot worse than I do now...it can wait. I just need some time to work up to it.. I know I need this care or this medication to stay healthy, or maybe even stay alive, but the trauma of my last experience at the Drs office gives me anxiety/scares me..

You deserve to feel safe, protected, and respected...

Even at the Doctors's Office.

ESPECIALLY AT THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE.

SOME KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER SO THAT YOU WALK OUT OF YOUR APPOINTMENTS EMPOWERED AND CONFIDENT ABOUT YOUR CARE:

Make note of their educational background and level of training of any member making decisions or instituting treatments on the doctor's behalf.

Verify that the doctor in charge is in agreement with any such changes or treatments.

If you don't understand something or it seems that some things aren't adding up, ask that the information be clarified in layman's terms.

Don't let medical jargon deter you from being in the know about your care. Repeat back to the physician or staff member your understanding of his/her statements.

There is no such thing as a dumb question.

You have the right to be fully informed and fully aware and understanding of your care/treatments.

Ask specifics to be properly informed.

For example: If told by your provider "the labs look good," ask about what specifically has been ruled out and tested.

This will alleviate anxiety, encourage a second look at the tests to make sure all was performed that was requested, & empower you.

OBSERVE AND ASK YOURSELF:

- » Do they know my medical history as it pertains to the issues/medical concerns I am currently having?
- » Is my care team consistently reassessing my medications for side effects and therapeutic benefits?
- » Is my medical team in direct contact with all of my doctors and discussing my care? I.e. Is the medical team working as a team?
- » Does your provider ask you about what language/ words you use to describe parts of your body, & do they use those words to discuss your body as it pertains to your visit or treatment?
- » Is your provider trauma informed?
- » Does the care you receive provide for your safety?
- » Do you feel that your provider has established trust with you or working towards that end?
- » Do they tell the truth and are they clear with intentions/ plans for you care?
- » Are they collaborating with you in planning/expectation setting for your care?
- » Are you given choices and is your self determination and dignity being honored? Is there shared decision making?
- » Are you being empowered/do you leave feeling good about yourself?
- » Does your provider allow for the self swab option for certain STI and pap screenings?
- » Do they talk in a soft, comforting tone?
- » Do they ask before they touch a part of your body?
- » Do they acknowledge that certain treatments or topics pertaining to your health/body may be uncomfortable?

CHOOSING A PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER

As we mentioned above, your provider is the person you will trust with sensitive information as well as your body and health.

You are entitled to ask questions and “interview” your provider to make sure they are right for you and your care. Make an appointment or arrange a phone call to “interview” potential medical care providers. Ask questions that you find important and pertinent to your specific care. *Note: Please remember that different clinics and insurance companies have different policies about cost for appointment to meet/interview potential new providers- check with both the Dr.s office and your insurance.*

Here are some sample questions you may want to ask potential providers who you may be considering for your care.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

» Do you have any experience providing gender affirming care to trans patients?

» Are you able to provide medical advice on how to manage hormones, post surgical care, and specific health screenings for trans patients?

» How long have you been providing gender affirming care?

» What is your educational background? And does your educational background include focused study on trans health?

» How did you learn about trans health and how do you keep current on your education.

» What, if any, training have you and your staff been provided in how to foster a safe and gender affirming environment for the trans community? *For example gender-neutral bathrooms, a safe and comfortable waiting room environment, willingness to use your requested name and pronoun, etc.*

» Do you operate under an informed consent model, and if not why?

» Are you familiar with World Professional Association for Transgender Health? Can you share with me what you know about WPATH?

» Does your organization/clinic have a nondiscrimination policy that covers sexual orientation and gender identity?

» What is your grievance process if I experience discrimination in your clinic?

» Does your staff display or share their pronouns and do they ask patients for theirs?

» Are you trauma informed and what does that mean to you? What does that look like in practice?

» Do you have signs or brochures representing the trans community?

» Do you know where to refer the trans community for support with housing, jobs, financial assistance, community connections?

» Additional notes:

CHOOSING A SURGEON

Deciding that a surgical procedure is a part of your journey is a big step. There is so much to consider – from your support team to the surgeon who you'll be choosing for your procedure.

BEFORE YOU START SEARCHING FOR A SURGEON THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS SHOULD BE ANSWERED:

How will you pay for your surgery?

Insurance? Private Pay? Go FundMe Campaign? Grant?

If you have insurance coverage: Does your plan cover the type of procedure that you want to receive? Do you know what your plan language is around coverage and benefits?

Financial and Informational Resource Lists

WA Apple Health – Eligibility Overview
<http://bit.ly/WHCinfo>

WA Apple Health – Immigrant Eligibility Overview & Toolkit
<http://bit.ly/imm-eli>
<http://bit.ly/imm-toolkit>

Needy Meds – Gender Affirming Surgery Grants Resource List
<http://bit.ly/NMtrans>

Gender Sexuality Info – Financial Help and Grants Resource List
<https://gendersexuality.info/financial-help/>

Grants, and Scholarship Opportunities

Jim Collins Foundation – Gender Affirming Surgery Grants
<https://jimcollinsfoundation.org/apply/>

Point of Pride – Gender Affirming Surgery Scholarships
<http://bit.ly/poptrans>

The Happy Transgender Center – Gender Affirming Surgery Grant
<http://bit.ly/happytranscenter>

Genderbands – Gender Affirming Top Surgery Grants
<https://www.genderbands.org/grants>

Tips for choosing the right surgeon for you:

Word of mouth. Who are some of the surgeons friends or folks close to you have chosen & what are the reasons behind their choice?

Check the surgeons credentials. This can be done online, typically on your State's Department of Health website.

<http://bit.ly/WA-DOH>

We suggest doing a “medical background check” on every surgeon you may be considering. This is because there are many things about surgeons that may not be on their website or immediately searchable on the internet.

<https://wmc.wa.gov>

» **Have they ever been accused or charged with malpractice? Why?**

» **Have they been found guilty of malpractice?**

We recommend using the results to weigh into whether or not you'd like to choose a particular surgeon. And if you decide to consult with this surgeon, bring up what you've found and ask about the ways that they've corrected and learned from that situation.

Check with your insurance company. Often times people forgo this step because let's be honest, nobody really likes having to make this call. Many times your insurance company will have an online access portal where you can search for gender affirming surgeons. *If this is not fruitful, call your insurance company.*

Does this surgeon have criteria for surgical eligibility that is different than your insurance? Many times surgeons will have their own requirements for approving surgeries such as mental health letters, or HRT for specific amounts of time. Please check with potential surgical providers about any extraneous requirements they may require.

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS:

By this point you will have pre-screened a few surgeons that are right for you. Your consultation is a chance for you to learn more about the procedure, more about the provider and their work, and ask any lingering questions that may not have been addressed via your own research.

» Am I a good candidate for this procedure?

» What will be expected of me to get the best results?

» Where and how will you perform my procedure?

» What surgical technique is recommended for me?

» How long of a recovery period can I expect, and what kind of help will I need during my recovery?

» What are the risks and complications associated with my procedure?

» How are complications handled?

» What are my options if I am dissatisfied with the outcome?

» Do you have before-and-after photos I can look at for this procedure and what results are reasonable for me and my body?

» Are you certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery?

» Were you trained specifically in the field of plastic surgery?

» How many years of plastic surgery training have you had?

» Are you a member of WPATH?¹

» What specific training do you have in top surgery techniques?

» Do you have hospital privileges to perform this procedure?
If so, at which hospitals?

» Is the office-based surgical facility accredited by a nationally or state-recognized accrediting agency, or is it state-licensed or Medicare-certified?

» Additional notes:

1: WPATH: World Professional Association for Transgender Health

CHOOSING A MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDER

Whether you are looking for long term therapy, medication or just to fulfill surgical letter requirements of your surgeon or insurance company; finding the mental health provider who will meet your unique mental health needs is especially important.

Here are some questions to ask a potential mental health provider (as well as questions at the end pertaining to medications if you are seeking a prescribing mental health provider):

PROVIDER-SPECIFIC QUESTIONS:

» What are your credentials?

» Are you licensed in this state?

» What level of education do you have?

» Do you have a particular approach, expertise or training?

» What experience do you have treating people with my condition?

» In your practice, do you have someone who prescribes medicine?

» Do you deal directly with my insurance plan or do I need to?

» How much will treatment cost me? Am I responsible for a co-payment?

» Do you have admitting privileges at a hospital?

» Are you willing to communicate with my other doctors and therapists to coordinate care?

» How hard is it to schedule an appointment?

» What times are you available to see me?

» How often do you recommend seeing me?

» Do you accept walk-in appointments?

» What, if any, insurance do you take?

» Do you offer sliding scale?

» Do you require appointments for everything or can I conduct some transactions (refills, adjustments, referrals) over the phone?

» What happens if I need to cancel or change an appointment?
Is there a fee?

» How hard is it to contact you outside of business hours?

» Do you charge for non-emergency consults after hours?

» Will I be able to contact you in an emergency?

» Do you have an off-site receptionist during off-hours to assist me in the case of an emergency?

» If you aren't available, is there a staff member who is on-call?

» What kind of other staff do you use - interns, students, physician's assistants, nurse practitioners, etc?

» What can I expect during a typical appointment? How long will it last?

» Will I get time to ask questions?

» Will you be asking about other elements of my life?

» Do I have to talk about things I do not want to?

» What are the risks and benefits associated with my treatment?

» How soon could I expect to see signs of feeling better?

» How long will my therapy sessions last?

» Are there going to be side effects to my medication?

» Are there alternative treatments that would be beneficial to recovery?

» Will symptoms return in the future? What will the warning signs be?

*Note: We acknowledge how difficult it may be to find a provider to find a provider immediately. Barriers such as long wait lists, lack of cultural competence or awareness, lack of POC and black providers, providers who don't accept state funded insurance, providers who don't accept insurance or have an established sliding scale system, may be something you find yourself up against. **Don't give up hope. Reach out to Ingersoll Gender Center's Healthcare Access Program and they can provide you with specialized recommendations and 1 on 1 direct support.***

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

It is no secret that many Trans and Gender Diverse folks experience fear, discomfort, and anxiety at the thought of visiting the Doctor. Various studies have shown that our community often has to navigate through systems and providers that are poorly trained or untrained & unprepared to support the needs and safety of the Trans and Gender Diverse community. Here at Ingersoll Gender Center want to support our community in mitigating these issues by providing a self advocacy tool kit in addition to strategies to accessing care, and questions to ask their providers in order to make sure that they are receiving the care that they need & deserve. Ingersoll Gender Center's Self Advocacy Guide is a helpful way for community members to walk into healthcare settings & interactions with providers armed with the tools they need to take charge of their care and be empowered and supported in doing so. **We want to support our community in mitigating these issues by providing a self advocacy tool kit in addition to strategies to accessing care, and questions to ask their providers in order to make sure that they are receiving the care that they need & deserve.**

ABOUT INGERSOLL GENDER CENTER

Ingersoll Gender Center is an organization by, and for transgender and gender diverse people that provides mutual support through peer-led support groups, advocacy in navigating resources, community organizing, and education — all in the pursuit of our collective self-determination.

INGERSOLL GENDER CENTER OFFERS FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR:




Amending Identification Documents

Financial assistance for community members who need support changing their name or amending their identity documents to reflect their name and gender identity.

Emergency HRT Support

One time financial support if you experience a health insurance denial or for whatever reason you cannot pay for your HRT.



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