



THE TRANS AGEING AND CARE (TrAC) PROJECT

Dignified and inclusive health and social care for older trans people in Wales

WHAT CAN I DO TO MAKE MY PRACTICE AND SERVICE MORE TRANS INCLUSIVE?

Guidelines for Healthcare Professionals

ABOUT OUR RESEARCH:

Not much is known about trans people's health and social care needs in later life. The little research that there is on the needs of trans adults has often focussed on access to healthcare and gender affirming treatments, but with little attention on trans ageing. The Trans Ageing and Care Project was a two-year mixed-methods study of trans individuals' health and social care needs, expectations and concerns in later life. The main objective was to better understand what the health and social care needs are of trans adults 50+ years, and to explore whether current health and social care services and professionals are meeting those needs in Wales.

Our aims were: 1) To identify the health and social care needs of trans people aged 50+ and their hopes, expectations and concerns about service provision in older age; 2) To examine attitudes and perceptions of health and social care professionals working with older people towards older trans people; and, 3) To produce digital stories and guidelines for health and social care practitioners on supporting older trans people in later life.

WHAT DID WE DO?

We spoke to 22 trans individuals in 2-part interviews about their experiences of health and social care services. We conducted an online questionnaire with 165 respondents employed in Welsh health and social care services (including GPs, medical staff, nurses, social workers, managers and administrators) to ascertain their views and attitudes on this topic.

In addition, we facilitated three workshops across Wales to bring together trans community members and health and social care professionals (including social workers) to identify areas for change for making services more trans-inclusive. Based on our findings, we've put together the following guidelines to make your practice and your service really trans-inclusive, person-centred and anti-discriminatory.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY THE WORD 'TRANS'?

'Trans' is an umbrella term used to describe a range of gender diverse people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differ in some way from the gender assumptions made about them at birth and the biological sex assigned to them. This could include individuals who are seeking to transition from male to female and female to male through gender affirming treatments, but it includes a much wider group of people who may not be seeking gender reassignment. People may identify as transsexual, transgender, transvestite/cross-dressing, gender queer or non-binary amongst many other gender diverse identities.

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW?

It's important to understand that an individual's understanding of their gender identity, and how they express this, may change across their lifetime and may continue to change in later life. It's also important to recognise that not every older individual questioning their assigned gender identity will seek to transition, either medically (e.g. hormone treatment) or surgically. An increasing number of older trans adults are identifying as non-binary or genderqueer and not identifying with a fixed gender identity (man/woman, feminine/masculine). Some individuals may identify as cross-dressers and not be invested in gender transitioning. Equally, do not assume that all individuals who have received gender affirming treatment may identify as trans.

Some people will have transitioned at earlier points in their life and may not wish to discuss or share this.

A psychosocial approach to an assessment of an older individual's care and support needs will bring a deeper understanding of the key psychological and social factors that have impacted on a person's wellbeing, their relationships to others and understanding of their identity. Social factors include recognition of the stressors an individual may experience from living in a 'cisnormative' society where gender is narrowly defined according to two sexes in a fixed binary. This can result in many individuals enduring a lifetime of experiencing misgendering (being addressed by their former gender), being outed as trans by others or encountering transphobic attitudes, abuse and discrimination in work, at home or in their local community. Psychological factors include the ways an individual has learnt to cope with these stressors over time, who they look to for emotional and practical support within their social network, and how they define and describe their gender identity in the past and currently.

When trans people seek to transition in later life, they may encounter ageist attitudes from health and social care professionals. Do not assume that trans individuals are too old to access gender affirming treatments – age alone should not be a barrier. Some trans individuals have waited a long time (sometimes, their whole life) to start this journey and deserve equal treatment and support as younger clients.

Transitioning in later life may hold different meanings for different people, depending on their experiences and

the resources available to them, for example financial. For some trans individuals this can represent a new lease of life and bring new opportunities to live their life as who they are. For others, barriers encountered in accessing gender affirming treatments may result in a continued sense of frustration and delay. This can sometimes foster a perception that they are running out of time to enjoy their life as who they are. Accessing gender identity clinics and gender affirming treatments can be expensive, even when funded through the NHS, and some older individuals may struggle financially, particularly if relying on a state pension.

Older trans individuals may have lived with a lifetime of being misgendered by others or encountering transphobic or discriminatory responses, including from health and social care professionals. Equally, some individuals may have lived long periods of their life in 'stealth' and not have discussed their trans identity with others. These difficult experiences can accumulate over time and diminish an individual's confidence in others. Trans individuals may not trust healthcare professionals or be reticent to share personal information and life-experiences. Therefore, it may take time to build rapport and trust with new patients who identify as trans and for patients to feel confident in healthcare professionals.

Later life can bring with it a number of anxieties for trans individuals about how they will be treated by healthcare practitioners if they require care services or need to move into long-term care in the future. Some

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trans individuals may have worries about living with dementia and losing control over day-to-day decision-making and their personal choices, such as what clothes to wear and how to dress. Some individuals will anticipate discriminatory treatment if care staff see surgical scars on their bodies while providing personal, intimate care. The views and attitudes of other residents in long-term care environments may also be a major concern. Trans older individuals can be highly vulnerable in these care settings and isolated from others.

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With end of life care, it's important to have early conversations with older trans patients about people that are important to them and who they want to have involved in their day-to-day care, their funeral arrangements and current and future decision-making. This may not always be family members; some trans individuals may have experienced rejection or hostility from family members during their lifetime and may not wish to have family involved in these decisions. Likewise, some individuals may be highly anxious about family members taking over control of their decision-making and funeral arrangements and not recognising their gender identity and celebrating who they are after death.

Equally, some individuals may be highly suspicious of officialdom and legal processes and therefore not have a living will, final will or lasting power of attorney in place.

WHAT CAN I DO AS AN INDIVIDUAL?

1. Accessing continuous professional development is essential. Stay up to date on current groups and services available for trans and gender diverse individuals in your local area.

2. Check your sources – be aware of media bias on reporting of trans issues. Local trans groups, networks and services may be a more valuable and reliable source of information.

3. Take professional responsibility for staying up to date on trans inclusive information and services – it is not the responsibility of trans individuals to educate healthcare professionals or find out information on services and treatments available. Stay informed about gender affirming treatments and services available through the NHS (where services may differ by UK nation). Remember that not all individuals are seeking to transition or to access gender affirming treatments.

4. Speak out when you hear comments from other colleagues and professionals that misgender trans individuals (i.e. do not use a person's correct name or gender pronoun), that dismiss their views and experiences, or that suggest trans patients are not deserving of NHS or local authority support – these negative comments are discriminatory, unethical and not in keeping with the Equality Act 2010.

WHAT CAN WE DO AS A SERVICE?

1. Organise trans inclusive training and professional development sessions for team members in your service or clinic. Speak to local trans groups and networks about involving trans individuals in the delivery of training – be prepared to offer full remuneration for community members' time and involvement in training. This should not be assumed to be free or voluntary.

2. Take the time to assess how inclusive your service is to trans individuals. This starts with friendly and welcoming attitudes from front-of-house and duty staff, provision of information on local trans support and services in reception and waiting areas, and the provision of gender-neutral bathrooms and signage for all staff and patients. Consider asking team members to wear name badges indicating their preferred gender pronoun.

5. Trans inclusive care means keeping the individual patient at the heart of good care – listening to and respecting their views and wishes. It's okay to ask questions if an individual patient knows they are being supported and listened to.

6. Respect a trans individual's privacy and do not share personal information without their consent – individual patients should have control over how and when they share personal information about themselves.

7. Do not assume that being trans is relevant to every healthcare problem. Trans identities and histories may not always be relevant or related to the person's presenting healthcare needs and concerns.

8. Think beyond diagnoses of gender dysphoria – this mental health diagnosis is not relevant to all trans individuals and for some individuals it can carry a stigma or a negative connotation.

3. Take a zero-tolerance stance on expressions of transphobia or misgendering by staff and people accessing your service. Make this clear to all (staff and patients) in agency policies on equal treatment and diversity.

4. Maintain up-to-date patient records that accurately reflect the correct names, titles and gender pronouns of patients. If unsure check with the individual concerned in a respectful and private manner.

5. Keep delays to a minimum when making referrals for trans individuals or seeking relevant information – some people have experienced a lifetime of delay and waiting, and further delays can impact negatively on a person's mental wellbeing.

HOW CAN I BE A BETTER ALLY?

1. Reach out to trans local groups and networks in your area or health board – invite consultation on how your service or clinic can be more trans-inclusive and aware. Offer remuneration for any consultancy provided.
2. Support trans community event and celebrations, such as Trans Pride, Pride Cymru or Sparkle events. Have a presence at these events and promote your service to trans individuals in your local community.
3. Read some of the information below and share with others in your team. Watch our digital stories online and discuss these as a team during a meeting or away day. Our digital stories can be accessed here: trans-ageing.swan.ac.uk

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FURTHER INFORMATION AND READING:

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