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Being trans aware and providing health care to transgender people

As a nurse or healthcare support worker, you will provide care for people from diverse backgrounds, and it is important that you help to create a safe and welcoming environment for all your patients and clients. As some trans patients have reported poor experiences in healthcare settings, your approach has a significant impact in ensuring better health outcomes for trans patients.

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) (2017) recommends that nurses must be positive and proactive in their approach to welcoming trans patients to their care. Nurses must always treat trans patients in a respectful way, and, if unsure about a person's gender identity or need more clarity about how they would like to be addressed, then the nurse should ask politely and discreetly. It is important to avoid disclosing a patient's trans status to anyone who does not explicitly need to know, and to discuss issues related to a patient's gender identity in private and with care and sensitivity.

Some important areas of health promotion for trans patients are listed in Box 1.

Trans women

- Prostate cancer: some trans women are at continued risk of prostate cancer and should continue to check prostate health
- Bone protection: hormone replacement therapy can increase the risk of osteoporosis
- Breast awareness: breast cancer can be hormone related and breast awareness is important

Trans men

- Cervical cancer awareness: where trans men retain their uterus
- Breast awareness: following breast removal trans men will have a lower risk profile but breast remains important

Source: adapted from Royal College of Nursing, 2017

Box 1. Some key areas of health promotion for transgender patients

Trans Awareness Week

Last month, Trans Awareness Week ran from 13 to 19 November and culminated with the Transgender Day of Remembrance on Sunday 20 November. Trans is a general term for people whose gender is different from that assigned to them at birth. Transgender Day of Remembrance is a day set aside to remember those who have lost their lives because of transphobia and violence against the trans community.

From a healthcare perspective, globally, trans rights are fragile and the rates of suicide and self-harm among the community are worryingly high. Approximately 67 countries have national laws criminalising same-sex relations between consenting adults. In addition, at least nine countries have national laws that criminalise forms of gender expression that target transgender and gender nonconforming people (Human Rights Watch, 2022). The facts and figures are harrowing but there is something that can be done to raise awareness and improve the lives of those who are transgender or are gender nonconforming, and that is to be an ally.

'Transgender, gender nonconforming, non-binary and intersex people across the world face widespread and high levels of violence and discrimination'

Transgender Day of Remembrance

The Transgender Day of Remembrance is held annually on 20 November to memorialise those individuals who have been murdered because of transphobia. It also aims to draw attention to the violence that is carried out towards many in the transgender community.

The Transgender Day of Remembrance was established in 1999 when transgender advocate Gwendolyn Ann Smith arranged a vigil as a memorial to transgender woman Rita Hester, who was killed in 1998. Initially a small local event, it has grown to be an annual internationally recognised day of remembrance, with events held in 185 cities across 20 countries (Stonewall, 2022).

Violence and discrimination

Transgender, gender nonconforming, non-binary, and intersex people across the world face widespread and high levels of violence and discrimination. What is also concerning are the very few countries that collect data on trans murders. The year 2021 saw more than 375 transgender people murdered, being the deadliest year since records began (Wareham, 2021).

This year, for the first time, Estonia and Switzerland reported the murders of trans people. In total, the last 12 months saw 327 reported murders of trans and gender-diverse people in the world because of anti-trans violence, according to Transgender Europe's (TGEU) (2022) Trans Murder Monitoring (TMM) project. Although TGEU has been collecting information since 2008, most trans murders still go under-reported. The TMM project systematically monitors, collects and analyses reports of murders of trans and gender-diverse people worldwide. The project started

in April 2009 as a co-operation between TGEU and the academic online magazine Liminalis – A Journal for Sex/Gender Emancipation and Resistance. Key points from the 2022 TMM report can be seen in Box 2.

Box 2. Information on the deaths of trans and gender-diverse people between 1 October 2021 and 30 September 2022

- 327 trans and gender-diverse people were reported murdered
- Cases from Estonia and Switzerland were reported for the first time – both victims were migrant Black trans women
- 95% of those murdered globally were trans women or trans feminine people
- Half of murdered trans people whose occupation is known were sex workers
- Of the cases with data on race and ethnicity, racialised trans people make up 65% of the reported murders
- 36% of the trans people reported murdered in Europe were migrants
- 68% of all the murders registered happened in Latin America and the Caribbean; 29% of the total happened in Brazil
- 35% of the murders took place on the street and 27% in their own residence
- Most of the victims who were murdered were between 31 and 40 years old

Source: Transgender Europe, 2022

Systemic limitations on the collection of hate crimes data, and the persistent mis-gendering after death of transgender people lost to violence, contribute to the under-counting of acts of anti-transgender violence. Despite these data limitations, data on anti-transgender homicides this year show that anti-transgender violence disproportionately harms and kills transgender women and girls of colour, and that a co-ordinated federal response is needed to end the crisis of anti-transgender violence and advance equality for gender diverse communities at the intersection of gender equity, racial justice and reproductive rights. Hundreds of trans and gender-diverse people are being killed each year around the world because of transphobic violence. Decision makers must take a stance against anti-trans forces and in defence of human rights, so that everyone can enjoy their life in equality, freedom, and safety.

Trans murder data continues to indicate a worrying global trend when it comes to the intersections of misogyny, racism, xenophobia and prejudice against and marginalisation of sex workers, with most victims being Black and migrant trans women of colour, and trans sex workers. The high number of murder reports from Latin America and the Caribbean can be attributed to the existence of established monitoring systems, and must be understood in the specific social, political, economic, and historical contexts in which they occur.

Nurses can do much at an individual and societal level to reduce the level of prejudice and discrimination faced by trans people.