Supporting Transgender Students

Brandon J. Sethi
School Liaison
Center of School Services and Educational Research
Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center
Background

- School liaison at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital
- Responsible for supporting school re-entry for both a Psychiatric in-patient unit and a Partial Hospitalization Program
  - Frequently work with patients struggling with anxiety, depression, school refusal, eating disorders, and gender dysphoria
- Day treatment program
  - School two hours per day
  - Create school transition plan to facilitate re-entry
  - Gradually return the patient to school over a period of a few days
Overview

- Case Study
- Deepening Understanding
- Impact on Education
- Supporting our Patients
- Resources
Objective

- Discuss effective strategies for supporting our transgender patients from hospital to schools
Statistics

- 2011 National Transgender Study on trans students found:
  - 78% experienced harassment / bullying
  - 35% experienced physical assault
  - 12% reported sexual violence
- 1/6th of the students in survey reported leaving school as a result of treatment
- Trans adults face higher degrees of harassment, homelessness, etc.
- Trans people of color are at a disproportionately high risk
- 41% of those surveyed reported a suicide attempt
  - Rates were even higher for those who had experienced high levels of harassment and bullying

Terms to Know

- Transgender
  - A person whose gender identity is different from what is generally considered typical for their sex assigned at birth
  - Sex refers to physical attributes associated with being “male” or “female”
- Cisgender
  - A person whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth
- Gender Nonconforming
  - Gender expression falls outside of what is generally considered typical
- Gender Expression
  - How a person expresses their gender through presentation and behavior
    - Can include name, clothing, hair, body language, etc.
- Gender Dysphoria
  - Intense and persistent discomfort with the sex characteristics of ones assigned birth

Timeline

- 1952: Christine Jorgenson becomes the 1st American to undergo a sex change
- 1987: DSM adds “Gender Identity Disorder”
  - 2013 the term is relabeled as “Gender Dysphoria”
- 1993: Minnesota becomes the 1st state to issue protections for transgender people
- 2014: Office for Civil Rights states, “‘Title IX’s sex discrimination prohibition extends to claims of discrimination based on gender identity or failure to conform to stereotypical notions of masculinity or femininity and OCR accepts such complaints for investigation.’“
- 2015: Pentagon announces it will allow transgender soldiers to serve openly
- 2016: Departments of Education and Justice rule that schools must treat students according to their gender identity
  - 2018: Education Department reverses ruling
  - Both decisions stem from interpretations of Title IX

https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/05/15/opinion/editorial-transgender-timeline.html
https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/qa-201404-title-ix.pdf
Case Study

- 14 years old FTM / 8th grade
- 2nd hospitalization during school year
- Patient had recently come out to parents
- Struggled academically
  - B/C student historically
  - Grades during hospitalization were D/F
- Was openly trans with counselor, but was not out with teachers
  - Struggled to find acceptance and peer groups at school
Case Study

- Met with family and explored how they would like to proceed
  - Presented the patients ideal situation
  - Parents hesitant to move forward - wanted to respect their child’s intentions
    - Expressed concern between patient being trans and fitting in better with male peers
- Family accepted referral to Children’s Hospital Trans Clinic
Case Study

- Met with family and school to review patient’s progress
  - Requested accommodations that were easily manageable
    - Patient requested to go by a new name
    - Patient requested access to nurses office bathroom
      - Given age and uncertainty of treatment, accommodations that were non-intrusive were the focus
      - Established supports for patient while at school
  - Counselor met with teachers at school to make them aware of plan
    - Included accommodations such as preferred seating and use of coping skills
- Patient returned to school one day and returned to our program the next
  - School day went well without incident
  - Patient reported feeling bullying had been resolved
The Genderbread Person

by www.ItsPronouncedMetrosexual.com

Gender Identity
- Woman
- Genderqueer
- Man

Gender identity is how you, in your head, think about yourself. It’s the chemistry that composes you (e.g., hormonal levels) and how you interpret what that means.

Gender Expression
- Feminine
- Androgynous
- Masculine

Gender expression is how you demonstrate your gender (based on traditional gender roles) through the ways you act, dress, behave, and interact.

Biological Sex
- Female
- Intersex
- Male

Biological sex refers to the objectively measurable organs, hormones, and chromosomes. Female = vagina, ovaries, XX chromosomes; male = penis, testes, XY chromosomes; intersex = a combination of the two.

Sexual Orientation
- Heterosexual
- Bisexual
- Homosexual

Sexual orientation is who you are physically, spiritually, and emotionally attracted to, based on their sex/gender in relation to your own.
School Re-entry Process

- Meeting with the family and formulating a list of desired supports
- Documenting these and presenting to school in a formalized setting to create conversation about what is possible
- Make a plan
  - Identify adult and peer supports that the student can rely on
  - Consider staff’s familiarity and level of support
    - Consider a team meeting to conduct education
    - Identify who will be on patients team and who will be made aware
Areas of Consideration

- Successfully supporting these students requires a safe and inclusive school environment
  - Begins with education and communication
  - Identify stakeholders and key supporters
    - Can include school RN, counselor, administrator, etc.
Areas of Consideration

- Restrooms / Locker Rooms
  - Consider protections for student
    - What does the student want? What is best for the student?
    - Document validity of patient’s treatment
  - Options can include:
    - using their preferred restroom
    - Nurses office
    - Unisex restrooms
Areas of Consideration

- Pronouns / Identification
  - Use of preferred pronouns affirms commitment to the student that they are valued and respected
  - Remind the student to be patient that it takes time and teachers / peers / family may need time to adjust

- Dress Code
  - Preferred to allow student to express their gender identity
Closing

- Trans students are a vulnerable and at-risk population needing additional supports.
- Political climate complicates the resources and supports that schools are willing to consider.
- Require significant levels of education and advocacy to ensure their safety and success.
Questions / comments

- What have been your experiences?
  - What hurdles have you encountered and how have you overcome them?
  - Have you experienced an evolution in how schools support these students?
Resources

- StraightforEquality.org
- GLESN.org
- The Trevor Project: [www.thetrevorproject.org](http://www.thetrevorproject.org)
  - Trevor Lifeline
    - Crisis intervention and suicide prevention hotline
    - 866.488.7386
- Gender Spectrum: [www.genderspectrum.org](http://www.genderspectrum.org)
- Human Rights Campaign: [www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org)