

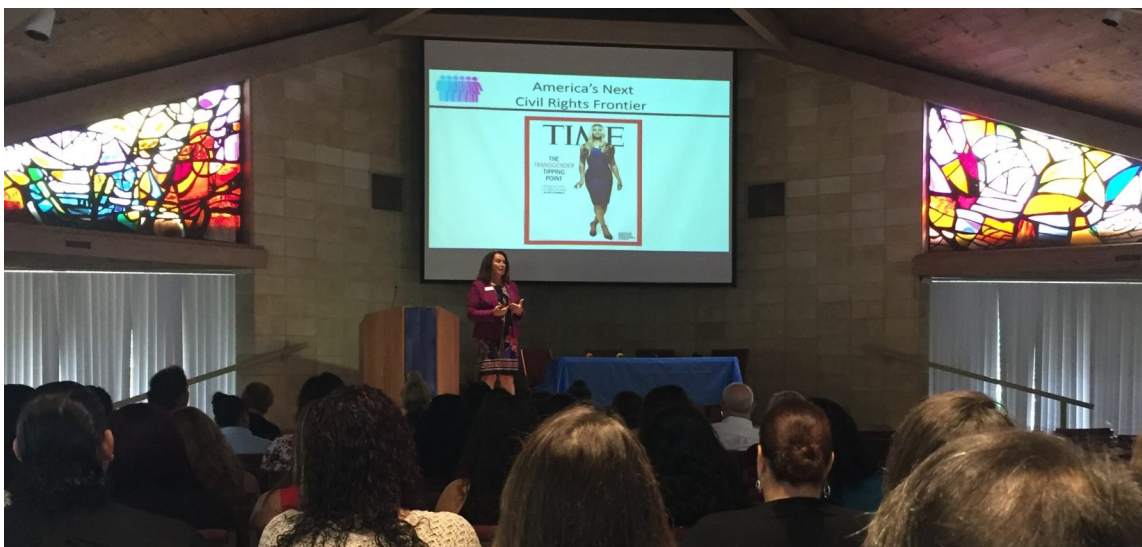
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# Planned Parenthood to offer inclusive services for transgender community

BY : KRISTA DI TUCCI, OCTOBER 3, 2016

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PLANNED PARENTHOOD, PPSWCF, TRANSGENDER

SARASOTA – Planned Parenthood of Southwest and Central Florida (PPSWCF) expanded services throughout its 11 regional health centers to include increased healthcare for transgender patients in 22 counties.

“This is a group of people who have been underserved and haven’t had access to this care,” Dr. Robert Slackman of PPSWCF says. “They’ve been ostracized not only by family and friends, but also by the medical field. We will be able to give them a service they’ve been denied.”

According to a national survey among transgender patients, 28 percent were subject to harassment in medical settings and 2 percent were physically assaulted in doctor’s offices; 19 percent were refused medical care, with higher numbers for people of color; and 28 percent postponed medical care when sick or injured due to discrimination.

“The challenges for the transgender community are real and documented,” Equality Florida Director of Transgender Inclusion Gina Duncan says. “The community continues to suffer under alarming rates of marginalization, harassment, and outright violence. The more we can mainstream the transgender community into all our institutions and hospitals, the more we can assimilate the transgender community into a position of equality. What Planned Parenthood is doing is elevating the ability for people to live their lives.”

According to Dr. Suzie Prabhakaran, PPSWCF Vice President of Medical Affairs, the organization has always been able to care for transgender patients through well-person care, health screening, breast exams, pap smears, STI testing, and contraception counseling and services. Anna Eskamani, PPSWCF Senior Director of Public Affairs, says the most significant addition to services will be hormone replacement therapy (HRT).

"Planned Parenthood has always been an ally to the LGBT community and we create safe spaces for all people to present as themselves," Eskamani says. "We wanted to show our commitment in a strong way by providing a space of care for all people. Replicating our role as an ally through healthcare is part of our critical mission."

Duncan says the availability of quality healthcare providers who are able to provide HRT, a vital part of transitioning, is scarce. Hence, patients often resort to online or black market hormone regimens which can be harmful to their health.

"Over the last five years, we've seen progress in different areas in our society," Duncan says. "Major employers see the importance of having a welcoming and diverse workplace. We've seen outcroppings in law enforcement, media, and school boards. Recently, the medical community has turned the corner and has seen the need in improving awareness and availability of services for the LGBT community. Planned Parenthood is taking a very positive step. This is absolutely huge and we commend them for taking this very bold step."

PPSWCF staff recently attended a seminar in which Duncan provided comprehensive transgender inclusion training. Duncan trained staff on issues such as the components and steps included when someone decides to transition, what being transgender means, understanding where patients are in their own transition journey and using correct pronouns and terminology.

"Any time you start a new service, you learn," Dr. Prabhakaran says. "We've done a lot of work to prepare our staff, but we know there will still be ongoing training. Our staff's biggest concern is meeting the needs that need to be met, and they are dedicated to making sure that happens."

Dr. Slackman says the medical staff will provide continual testing during HRT to make sure patients are receiving enough medication

for desired results without experiencing adverse side effects. He says some risks include blood clots, liver damage and increased blood counts.

According to Dr. Prabhakaran, HRT services will be available for patients over 18 years of age. However, transgender patients under 18 can continue to seek health services and counseling through PPSWCF. She says PPSWCF hopes to eventually offer HRT to minors, but since therapy is a new service, providers will need to first become accustomed to care.

Dr. Slackman says since finances are one of the biggest challenges transgender people face with HRT, PPSWCF will offer significantly lower costs than those of private practices. He says to help keep costs low for patients, PPSWCF facilities will offer cost-effective medications, give patients the option to administer their own injections, and attempt to reduce the number of office visits.

Dr. Prabhakaran says patients will attend two office visits before starting therapy. The provider will discuss medical history, determine the patient's plan, and perform baseline testing. She says barring underlying medical issues, HRT is usually not a lengthy process.

"For most people, going to the doctor or getting healthcare is part of normal, everyday living," Duncan says. "For transgender people, without adequate, quality healthcare providers, it's a time of stress and disconnection from society and leads to patients feeling very isolated. Offering medical services perpetuates normalcy for the transgender community."

Eskamani says the final step in PPSWCF's new services will be ensuring all facilities are inclusive by taking steps such as providing adequate bathrooms for all gender identities.

"I think we've always provided a safe and welcoming environment," Eskamani says. "Our new services will allow us to continue to meet the needs of our greater community."

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