

# Trans Patient Care Guide

for  
health care  
professionals

an overview from the  
Trans Equality Society of Alberta

# Introduction

Trans\* patients—just as any other patient—may have a variety of health care needs that requires the attention of a number of professionals. This overview is intended to help healthcare professionals establish a safe and welcoming environment for trans individuals.

A trans person may be anyone who:

- has a gender identity that is different from their natal sex, or
- expresses their gender in ways that contravene societal expectations of the range of possibilities for men and women.

Trans is *not*:

- a sexual orientation, or
- a sexual fetish.

“ Primary care providers do not have to be experts in transgender medicine to meet the health needs of most transgender patients. With appropriate understanding of basic transgender issues and a little experience, non-expert primary care providers can offer health maintenance, acute illness and chronic disease management, and referral to specialists.”

– Vancouver Coastal Health, 2006, p.1



**\*Trans** is a term that can include many gender variant people, including but not limited to: transsexual, intersexed, or transgender individuals; crossdressers; drag performers; and genderqueer individuals. The term may be used by anyone who doesn't fit entirely into stereotypical gender roles.

# When patients arrive

Trans identity continues to be socially stigmatizing. Experiences with trans phobia, discrimination and in some cases discomfort with their bodies keeps some trans patients from seeking medical attention.



## Welcoming patients

Trans patients are first and foremost patients. Please remember that:

- all staff—from reception to technicians—should refer to the patient as they prefer to be addressed (if in doubt, have the staff discretely inquire as to the patient’s preference of address)
- be sensitive that diverse identities and terms may be used within the trans community, and
- public disclosure or “outing” could endanger the individual’s life.

# Trans-friendly healthcare facilities respect language ...

## Please remember:

- not all trans individuals are open about their trans status to the general public
- remember to respect the language used by your patient (while remembering that other trans patients may prefer or be more comfortable with different terms), and
- discuss any information, omissions or paperwork—including discrepancies in the patient's identification—in a discrete, confidential manner.



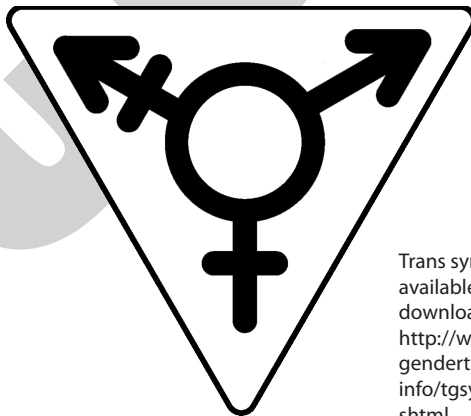
I went to a medical clinic for a blood test and showed my Alberta healthcare card and identification then went to sit down. The staff took me off to the side to square up my I.D. and it was promptly changed in the system.”



I let the person at the desk know my name change but the nurse called me by my former name, I didn't reply. The nurse called the former name again, I still didn't answer. Finally, the nurse shouted out Mister [female name]. The nurse blatantly refused to refer to me in a polite and professional manner.

# Trans-friendly healthcare facilities have ...

- Bathrooms and shower facilities that are non-gender specific.
- Forms and record keeping that are gender inclusive.
- Signage to indicate the office is a trans-positive space.



Trans symbol  
available for  
download at  
[http://www.gendertalk.com/  
info/tgsymbol.  
shtml](http://www.gendertalk.com/info/tgsymbol.shtml)

# Trans-friendly healthcare facilities check ...

- Regular, routine concerns related to gender.

## Please remember:

- Focus care on current issue.
- This is not a training opportunity. However, if you have questions, ask if the patient is willing to discuss their condition in greater detail with you or your colleagues.

### For example:



Because so many people are impacted by gender issues, I have begun to ask everyone about it. Anything you say about gender issues will be kept confidential. If this topic isn't relevant to you, tell me and I'll move on.

Out of respect for my clients' right to self-identify, I ask all clients what gender pronoun they'd prefer I use for them. How do you prefer to be addressed?

– questions, Vancouver Coastal Health, 2006, p. 3



# Trans-friendly healthcare facilities take a thorough patient history ...

## Review

As with any patient, review general health history, all medications and recent physical exams (pap, rectal, testicular, as appropriate). Remember that because trans individuals may not have access to preventative healthcare or treatment for routine health problems they may have a number of medical needs.



## Please remember

A trans individual's gender presentation does not eliminate the need for proper health care, such as:

- male to female (MTF) transsexuals may need an annual prostate exam
- female to male transsexuals (FTM) may have the need for an internal exam.
- intersexed people may have a combination of needs, and
- trans women who are post-operative will need annual internal swabs, just like any other post-hysterectomy women do; likewise, some trans men will require the same examination.

If in doubt as to the detailed needs, ask. Many trans people endeavour to be informed patients.

If your patient is taking hormones, remember that hormones are a medically-necessary part of most transition processes. When trans people ask for hormones, it's not because they're doing so on a whim.

# Trans-friendly healthcare facilities respect the needs & health of the patient ...

Only perform a physical exam when medically necessary.

Laboratory and other forms need to be completed with the best interest of the patient in mind.



## What should I consider?

“Transgender patients may be uncomfortable with their bodies and may find some elements of physical examination traumatic. Unless there is an immediate medical need, sensitive elements of the exam (particularly breast, genital and rectal exam) should be delayed until strong clinician-patient rapport has developed ... Discuss with your patients when, where and how you might need to touch. When the purpose of the exam is explained clearly, most patients will understand.”

– Vancouver Coastal Health, 2006, p.6





## How do I requisition tests?

“Most requisition forms for laboratory tests ask for the sex of the patient to provide the primary care provider with normal ranges for the results (which are often sex-dependent) and to flag abnormal results... The primary care provider will need to balance consideration of the following issues: (a) the stress placed on the patient going into the lab with a sex on the form that doesn't match their name/appearance, (b) getting the lab values most appropriate to the patient's physiology, and (c) minimizing lab error in performing the correct test in the correct manner. Interpretation of lab results is dependent on the patient's physiology and the specific test being performed”

– Vancouver Coastal Health, 2006, p.7





"A physician's criteria for selection must not include any prohibited ground of discrimination including age, gender, marital status, medical condition, national or ethnic origin, physical or mental disability, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation or socio economic status."

– Alberta Health Professional Act 7(2), 2010

# To learn more ...

The following links contain a wide variety of information related to patient care for trans individuals.

## CANADIAN TRANS HEALTH RESOURCES

Sherbourne Health Centre Trans Protocols  
<http://www.sherbourne.on.ca/PDFs/Trans-Protocols.pdf>

TransPULSE Project (Ontario) Publications  
[http://transpulse.ca/public\\_downloads.html](http://transpulse.ca/public_downloads.html)

Vancouver Coastal Health Transgender Program  
<http://transhealth.vch.ca/>

## GENDER REASSIGNMENT

GRS Montreal  
<http://www.grsmontreal.com/>

WPATH Standards of Care  
[http://wpath.org/publications\\_standards.cfm](http://wpath.org/publications_standards.cfm)

## PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Canadian Professional Association for Transgender Health  
<http://www.cpath.ca/>

World Professional Association for Transgender Health  
<http://www.wpath.org/>

## OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

AlbertaTrans.org (a website, not an organization)  
<http://albertatrans.org>

Trans Equality Society of Alberta  
<http://www.tesaonline.org/>

**NOTE: This version for online distribution only. To receive the hardcopy booklet version, please contact TESA.**

**This overview was produced by TESA, the Trans Equality Society of Alberta.**

**TESA's mission is to be a witness to and a voice for matters concerning trans-identified Albertans.**

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