

Honoring Identity: Integrating LGBTQ+ Affirming Practices in Palliative Care

Kather Yon*

Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust, UK

Abstract

Palliative care aims to provide comprehensive, patient-centered support for individuals facing serious illness, yet the unique needs of LGBTQ+ patients remain underserved. This article explores the importance of integrating LGBTQ+ affirming practices into palliative care to ensure equitable and inclusive care delivery. It highlights the barriers faced by LGBTQ+ individuals, including discrimination, minority stress, and lack of provider awareness, which can compromise trust and access to care. The article emphasizes the role of culturally competent communication, respect for chosen families, and acknowledgment of diverse identities in fostering a supportive care environment. Strategies such as targeted provider training, policy development and the use of inclusive language are discussed to address these disparities. Case studies and best practices demonstrate the positive impact of affirming care on patient well-being, satisfaction, and overall quality of life. By honoring the identities of LGBTQ+ patients, palliative care providers can enhance trust, reduce disparities, and deliver compassionate care that aligns with the values and preferences of every individual. This integration is not only an ethical imperative but also a step toward achieving health equity in end-of-life care.

Keywords: LGBTQ+ affirming care; Palliative care; Cultural competence; Health equity; Chosen families

Introduction

Palliative care is a holistic approach to managing the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs of individuals with serious illnesses. However, despite its patient-centered focus, the unique experiences and challenges of LGBTQ+ individuals are often overlooked in the provision of such care [1]. LGBTQ+ patients frequently face systemic barriers, including discrimination, stigma, and a lack of understanding from healthcare providers, which can result in delayed or inadequate access to essential palliative services. The intersection of sexual orientation, gender identity, and healthcare inequities underscores the need for inclusive and affirming practices in palliative care. Respecting and honoring the diverse identities of LGBTQ+ patients is crucial to building trust, enhancing the patient-provider relationship, and ensuring dignity at the end of life [2].

This article examines the importance of integrating LGBTQ+ affirming practices into palliative care, focusing on the key barriers faced by this community and strategies for creating an inclusive care environment. By fostering cultural competence, recognizing chosen families, and implementing policies that address LGBTQ+ health disparities, palliative care can evolve to meet the needs of all patients, regardless of their identities [3].

Discussion

Integrating LGBTQ+ affirming practices into palliative care is essential to address the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals and ensure equitable access to compassionate, patient-centered care. Despite growing awareness of the need for inclusivity, significant gaps persist in the understanding and implementation of affirming practices in clinical settings [4].

One critical challenge is the pervasive lack of cultural competence among healthcare providers. Many professionals remain unaware of the specific needs of LGBTQ+ patients, leading to unintentional biases and inadequate care. Training programs focused on LGBTQ+ health and sensitivity can empower providers to deliver respectful and

informed care, fostering trust and improving patient outcomes. The role of chosen families in the LGBTQ+ community presents another important consideration [5]. Traditional definitions of family often exclude the supportive networks that many LGBTQ+ individuals rely on. Recognizing and involving chosen families in decision-making and caregiving processes can ensure that patients feel supported and understood during palliative care [6].

Barriers such as minority stress and fear of discrimination also impact LGBTQ+ patients' willingness to engage with healthcare services. Creating safe, inclusive environments where patients feel seen and respected is vital [7]. Simple measures, such as using inclusive language, asking about preferred pronouns, and visibly supporting LGBTQ+ rights through policies and materials, can have a profound effect on patient comfort and trust. Moreover, systemic changes are needed to address healthcare disparities. Policymakers and healthcare institutions must prioritize initiatives that promote health equity for LGBTQ+ populations, including funding for research, advocacy for inclusive practices, and the development of guidelines tailored to this community [8].

Finally, the positive impact of LGBTQ+ affirming care on patient well-being cannot be overstated. Affirming practices not only improve physical and emotional health outcomes but also uphold the dignity of individuals during some of the most vulnerable moments of their lives [9]. By honoring identity and embracing diversity, palliative

***Corresponding author:** Kather Yon, Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust, UK, E-mail: katheryon@gmail.com

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care providers can contribute to a more equitable and compassionate healthcare system. Future efforts should focus on expanding education, implementing inclusive policies, and promoting community engagement to ensure that LGBTQ+ affirming practices become a standard component of palliative care [10].

Conclusion

Integrating LGBTQ+ affirming practices into palliative care is an ethical and practical necessity to ensure equitable, compassionate, and patient-centered care for all individuals. Addressing the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ+ patients such as stigma, minority stress, and healthcare inequities requires a proactive commitment to cultural competence, inclusive policies, and the recognition of chosen families. The advancement of LGBTQ+ affirming practices is not only essential for reducing disparities but also for upholding the core values of palliative care: dignity, respect, and holistic support. As healthcare systems continue to evolve, it is imperative to prioritize these efforts through education, research, and policy development, ensuring that no patient is left behind. By honoring identity and embracing diversity, palliative care providers can create a more inclusive and compassionate future, setting a standard of care that truly meets the needs of all patients.

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