Survey of adults accessing NHS versus private services for transgender care in the UK

Abstract

We have previously described a digital model for providing transgender care (GenderGP).

Patients access the service via email and are assessed by email/telephone/video or face to face consultation. Our patient source is diverse, from online browsing, forums, support groups, word of mouth and referrals from charities, GPs and Gender Clinics.

Assessments are made by doctors and trained psychologists/counsellors using a combination of questionnaires, email discussions, telephone, video and face to face consultations depending on need.

Introduction

'The NHS is failing in its legal duty to transgender patients. House of Commons Women's and Equality Commission 2016'



Methods and Materials

We conducted a survey of transgender adults accessing NHS services, using social media as the source of participants, and compared the responses with adults who had accessed GenderGP.

Respondents answered a confidential questionnaire asking about their experiences of currently available services within the UK.

Questions were asked about their experiences with their primary care general practitioner, specialties NHS clinic and compared with experiences of the digital model of healthcare provision.

Results

There were 556 respondents. The average age was 38 years (17 - 85)

General Practice (GP)

- 85.6% of respondents had initially approached their GP for help. 45% felt that the GP had offered little or no help. 33% did however feel their GP had been helpful to some degree.
- In those who had received no help, 85% felt that this was because the GP lacked knowledge and training, 18% because the GP was 'transphobic' and 26% because of funding issues
- 53% felt that they received an inferior service from their GP compared to cisgender patients, however 60% expressed the view that they would rather have their hormone treatment via their GP than the GIC
- Lack of access to hormone treatment was the cause of greatest anxiety to 64% of respondents
- One third of patients (33.8%) felt that interactions with the medical profession had caused them the greatest distress, followed by problems with family (31%) and general public (28.4%). Only 2% admitted to problems with friends

NHS Gender Identity Clinics (GICs)

- 339 patients had been seen at a GIC
- 42.2% rated their experience with the GIC as poor (13%) or very poor (29.2%) whilst 31% rated their experience as good (19.5%) or outstanding (11.5%).
- 35.7% had considered suicide or self harm as a direct response to their experience.
- In 82.9%, timely access to gender affirming hormones was the greatest concern.

Unacceptable waiting and assessment times, poor administration and the insistence on real life experience (RLE) were the main reasons given for the poor experience.

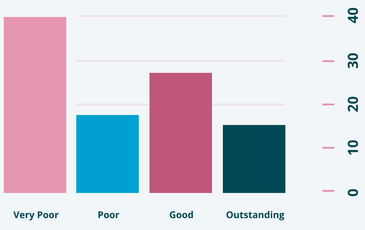
GenderGP

332 patients had been a previous patient of GenderGP

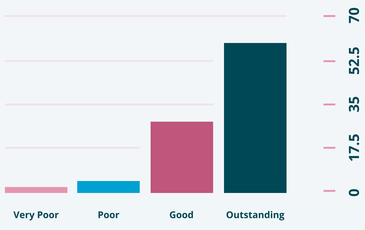
- 87.4% rated their experience as good (27.1%) and outstanding (60.3%).
- 4% rated their experience as poor (2.6%) and very poor (1.4%).

Delayed responses to emails and an 'overcautious' approach to counselling were the main reasons given for the poor experience.

Experience ratings at the NHS Gender Identity Clinics



Experience ratings at www.GenderGP.com



Recommendations

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- Improved education for GPs along with a dedicated funding stream, with more patients being managed at a local level, would significantly improve primary care management of transgender patients in the UK.
- Restructuring of specialist GICs, with improved waiting times and shorter assessment periods, would significantly enhance the patients' experience of GICs
- The use of digital models and distant consultations for assessment and treatment of transgender patients, are effective and highly regarded and should be considered in the NHS future plans for transgender healthcare.

Contacts

GenderGP
www.GenderGP.com

References

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Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 8 December 2015
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