



# In The Pink

**Providing Excellent Care for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People**  
A Practical Guide for GPs and other Health Practitioners



**NHS**

*Leicester City*

**Lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people** are estimated to make up around 6% of the population; this means there are about 18,000 LGB residents in Leicester. Some of us are very recognisable, but many will not be visible when meeting healthcare professionals.

The last few years have been a time of significant change for the LGB community, with new legislation bringing greater legal equality. Service providers, including healthcare professionals, must now ensure that they are not discriminating on the grounds of sexual orientation. The Department of Health has been proactive in promoting equality, not least with its Pacesetters project (under which this booklet has been developed) which seeks to reduce health inequalities for minority groups.

However, the effects of homophobia and discrimination are still being felt. Many LGB people will have experienced isolation, rejection, fear or even violence. These multiple experiences of discrimination can impact profoundly on health. Negative experiences in the past can also make people wary of accessing healthcare, or of disclosing relevant information to practitioners. Locally, the

SexYOUality Matters survey of LGB people living in and around Leicester highlighted significant barriers to accessing healthcare. In response to this, Prism (the LGBT community forum) has chosen healthcare as a key area of concern and has assisted with the development of this guide.

Personally, I think most of us find being a GP a fairly challenging job and that we care a great deal about providing a high standard of care for our patients. I don't think I am alone in sometimes struggling during consultations with patients whose background or lifestyle is radically different from my own.

This booklet sets out a summary of the most relevant medical information when providing care for the LGB community. But more than that, it demonstrates a few basic steps we can take in our day-to-day practice that will ensure that we are providing excellent care for all our patients. I hope you find it useful.

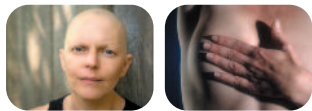
**Dr T. Morton Jones**  
Leicester City GP



# In the Pink

# Top 10 Tips for Providing Inclusive Healthcare

01. **Don't make assumptions** about a patient's sexual orientation or gender identity.
02. **Be aware of the language** you are using when talking to patients, does it presume heterosexuality? Try to use gender neutral language, listen to how people describe their identity and reflect this.
03. **Behaviours will not always match labels.** Someone may present as heterosexual but have same-sex partners or vice versa. Be open to this possibility.
04. **Create a welcoming atmosphere** where lesbian, gay and bisexual patients feel comfortable discussing their health concerns. For example, display a statement in your waiting room explicitly demonstrating commitment to fair treatment for all, irrespective of sexual orientation.
05. **Promote tolerance** amongst all staff and encourage an environment where homophobia is unacceptable and can be challenged.
06. **Be aware of specific health issues** for different groups – you'll find more information later in this booklet.
07. **Don't forget that families and friends** of LGB people can be affected by the sexual identity of others and that specific support is available to them.
08. **Remember that domestic violence** occurs in same sex relationships as well as in heterosexual ones.
09. **Think about confidentiality** – consider discussing with the patient what you record in their notes about their sexuality, this information is potentially very sensitive.
10. **Use specialist services** – when in doubt contact or refer to the specialist services listed in the back of this booklet.



## Cancer



**10% of lesbians have abnormal smears – this includes 5% of lesbians who had never had penetrative sex with a man.**

**One in twelve lesbian and bisexual women aged between 50 and 79 have been diagnosed with breast cancer, compared to one in twenty women in general.**

**Men who have sex with men are more likely to contract anal cancer. HIV positive men have double this increased risk of developing anal cancer.**

As we know, one in three people will contract cancer in their lives. However, there are certain cancers which may be more prevalent in the LGB community, or which lesbian, gay and bisexual people may have been erroneously advised they are not at risk of contracting.

HPV is transmitted in sexual fluids, including contact with genitals, hands or toys and therefore can be transmitted between women when having sex. Despite this, lesbians are often advised that they don't need smear tests. Many women who identify as lesbian will have had sex with men in the past or have partners who have. Although the risk of cervical cancer is lower within this group, women who have sex with women should still be advised to have regular smear tests.



Some studies show that breast cancer is more prevalent in women who have sex with women, possibly because they are less likely to have given birth. 20% of lesbians say that they never self-examine their breasts and only 30% say they do so every month.

Anal cancer is strongly linked to HPV transmission and is very treatable when caught early. The incidence of anal cancer is estimated as high as 37 per 100,000 in gay men (which is similar to the rate of cervical cancer in women before the introduction of regular cervical smear testing). This rate almost doubles amongst HIV positive men. There is ongoing research into anal smears which show promise at detecting early anal cancers.



### How can you make improvements?

- Ensure that all patients have access to information and screening programmes.
- Advise lesbians to have regular smears, regardless of whether they have ever had intercourse with a man.
- Encourage all women to regularly self-examine their breasts, and to attend screening sessions if they are over the age of 50.
- Consider discussing the risks of anal cancer with men who have sex with men (many will never have heard of this) and keep in mind the increased incidence in this population. This is especially important for men who are HIV positive or have a high number of sexual partners.



## Mental Health, Self Harm and Suicide

**52% of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in Leicester said they had suffered from depression and 35% had serious thoughts of self harm.**

**20% of lesbians have had an eating disorder compared to 5% of all women.**

Anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicidal feelings are more common among LGB people than among heterosexual people. Experiences of mental health services are mixed. Many patients report problems ranging from instances of overt homophobia and discrimination to a perceived lack of empathy around sexuality issues on the part of clinicians.

Some LGB people may experience discrimination on multiple levels, for example they may be disabled or older. This can exacerbate the impact on a patient's mental and physical health.

### How can you make improvements?

- Acknowledge that for some people, their sexual orientation and experiences of homophobia may cause distress. Where possible take time to listen and talk to patients about their experiences, being led by them and what they feel comfortable discussing. **Be aware that for some LGB people, their sexual identity has a very positive impact on their life.**
- For many patients at times of distress, referral to a practice therapist will be appropriate. However, some LGB patients may prefer to see a therapist who is known to be LGB "friendly" and able to offer specialist advice.





## Substance Misuse

**17% of LGB people in Leicester rate their drinking as excessive or binge. Half of local gay or bisexual men report drinking more than 21 units per week of alcohol. This compares to 20% of men in Leicester generally.**

**In 2004, nearly 50% of LGB people in Leicester were smokers, compared to just 27% of the general population.**

Research shows that lesbian, gay and bisexual people are 2-3 times more likely than heterosexual people to suffer from drug and alcohol addiction. They are also far more likely to continue to use or misuse drugs and alcohol for longer periods of time than heterosexual people for whom this tends to decline after the age of 30.

### How can you make improvements?

- Create an atmosphere where a patient feels comfortable discussing concerns about substance misuse and able to seek advice.
- Be aware of increased risks but remember that, as with any population, there is a wide range of lifestyles within the LGB community so avoid making assumptions.





## Sexual Health for Men who have Sex with Men (MSM)

**41% of those diagnosed with HIV in 2007 were men who have sex with men.**

**60% of people diagnosed with syphilis in 2006 were men who have sex with men.**

**44% of gay and bisexual men in Leicester have never had an HIV test.**

**Men who have sex with men (MSM) are still at a higher risk for HIV infection – around half of those living with HIV in Britain are gay or bisexual men. Gay and bisexual men may also be at higher risk for other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).** Some men who have sex with men do not identify as gay but may still be at risk. Conversely, not all men who have sex with men will be in a 'high-risk' category. For example, some gay men never have anal sex and many gay men are in long-term committed relationships.

Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) may be available for patients who have been exposed to the HIV virus, within 72 hours of contact. PEP can be obtained from A&E and GUM Clinics.







## How can you make improvements?

- Avoid making assumptions about sexual behaviour based purely on sexual identity. If you need to know what kind of sex someone is having, ask them!
- Be prepared to give relevant safer sex advice (see right).
- Consider advising patients about Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP).

## Safer Sex advice for Men who have Sex with Men

- Men should be encouraged to always use well-fitting condoms and water-based lubricant for anal sex. Trade Sexual Health supplies free packs which contain both – see page 12 for contact details.
- Although the risk is lessened, HIV and other STIs can be passed through oral sex, particularly if there are cuts in the mouth. Advise men to avoid brushing teeth just before sex and to consider using a barrier method.
- Sexually active men should be encouraged to attend for regular STI testing.
- Advise men who have sex with men to get vaccinated against Hepatitis A & B.





## Sexual Health for Women who have Sex with Women (WSW)



**50% of lesbian and bisexual women have never been tested for STIs.**

**Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) is more common in women who have sex with women and can be transmitted between them (commonly by sharing sex toys).**

Many women encounter questions around sex that presume they are heterosexual, this can be an alienating experience. Unfortunately most lesbian and bisexual women will have never received any relevant sex education or advice.

Remember many WSW have current or previous sexual relationships with men, some may require contraception. Just like all communities, WSW may engage in a wide variety of sexual activities including oral sex, penetrative sex with fingers, hands (fisting) or toys and anal sex.



## How can you make improvements?

- Use open questions that don't assume sexual orientation or sexual behaviour.
- Remember BV is more common in WSW and can be sexually transmitted.
- Be prepared to give relevant safer sex advice (see right).

## Safer Sex advice for Women who have Sex with Women

- Use condoms where appropriate on sex toys, or use separate toys or hands for each partner.
- Women should also be advised to wash hands before and after sex.
- Use gloves and lube if fisting.
- Risk of transmission of HIV through oral sex is low but does exist. Dental dams can be used to minimise this.
- Trade Sexual Health supplies safer sex packs for women which contain a dental dam, a condom and lubricant.





## Local Organisations

### **Leicester Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Centre**

15 Wellington Street, Leicester LE1 6HH

0116 254 7412 • [www.llgbc.com](http://www.llgbc.com) • [info@llgbc.com](mailto:info@llgbc.com)

Helpline (Tuesday & Thursday evenings) 0116 255 0667

Organisation providing support and information to the LGBT communities of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. They run a helpline, host various social and support groups and have a small counselling service. The Centre can also advise on a wide range of issues relating to sexual orientation. Their website contains links to various local and national support groups and has a handy 'Infobank' section with a range of resources on healthcare.

### **TRADE Sexual Health**

15 Wellington Street, Leicester LE1 6HH

0116 254 1747 • [www.tradesexualhealth.com](http://www.tradesexualhealth.com) • [info@tradesexualhealth.com](mailto:info@tradesexualhealth.com)

Trade is a Leicester based HIV & AIDS prevention and sexual health charity for men who have sex with men and women who have sex with women. We offer free and confidential sexual health advice & information, safer sex packs for men and women, information on testing for STI's and HIV, counselling and one-to-one support, support in 'coming out', sexuality and relationships. Outreach services and volunteering opportunities. Full details of all our services can be found on our website.



# National Organisations

## Broken Rainbow

The UK's only organisation offering support to LGBT victims and survivors of domestic violence and abuse. Runs a confidential helpline.

**0845 260 4460 • [www.broken-rainbow.org.uk](http://www.broken-rainbow.org.uk)**

## FFLAG

### Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays

A national voluntary organisation and helpline supporting the parents and families of lesbian and gay people.

**0845 652 0311 • [www.fflag.org.uk](http://www.fflag.org.uk)**

## GLADD Gay and Lesbian Association of Doctors and Dentists

Nationwide association of LGBT doctors, dentists and dental and medical students. GLADD provides support, information, networking and socialising opportunities.

**GLADD, BM Box 5606, London, WC1N 3XX**  
**[www.gladd.co.uk](http://www.gladd.co.uk)**

## The Gender Trust

Support for anyone affected by gender identity issues.

**0845 231 0505 • [www.gendertrust.org.uk](http://www.gendertrust.org.uk)**

## Pink Parents

National project aiming to reduce the isolation and discrimination that LGBT families and families-to-be face.

**01380 727 935 • [www.pinkparents.org.uk](http://www.pinkparents.org.uk)**

## Pink Therapy

Hosts a 'Directory of Pink Therapists', which lists qualified therapists around the UK who adopt a sexuality-affirmative stance and do not see sexual or gender variation as a sickness.

**020 7434 0367 • [www.pinktherapy.com](http://www.pinktherapy.com)**

## Stonewall

National campaigning organisation for LGB people.

**08000 502 020 • [www.stonewall.org.uk](http://www.stonewall.org.uk)**

## UK Lesbian & Gay Immigration Group

Provides advice on immigration and seeking asylum for lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

**020 7922 7811 • [www.uklgig.org.uk](http://www.uklgig.org.uk)**





# Useful Documents, References & Weblinks

## General

**[www.healthwithpride.nhs.uk](http://www.healthwithpride.nhs.uk)**

Website aimed at providing LGBT people and their healthcare providers with information on a range of healthcare issues.

**Prescription for Change: Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Health Check 2008**

Results of a survey of over 5,000 women. Downloadable from [www.stonewall.org.uk](http://www.stonewall.org.uk).

**'Reducing health inequalities for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people - briefings for health and social care staff'**

A series of NHS guides, downloadable from the Publications section of [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk).

**'SexYOUality Matters' and 'How To Be LGBT Friendly'**

'SexYOUality Matters' is a result of a major survey of the experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in and around Leicester. 'How To Be LGBT Friendly - 30 Practical Ways to Create a Welcoming Environment for LGBT People' is a short booklet produced by Prism. Both are available to download from [www.llgbc.com](http://www.llgbc.com).

## Mental Health

**[www.lgbtmind.com](http://www.lgbtmind.com)**

Resources available for patients and staff.

**'Mental disorders, suicide, and deliberate self harm in lesbian, gay and bisexual people: a systematic review'**

Downloadable from [www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/08/63/15/self-harm-in-lesbian-gay-and-bisexual-people.pdf](http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/08/63/15/self-harm-in-lesbian-gay-and-bisexual-people.pdf).



## Drugs and Alcohol

The Lesbian & Gay Foundation's website has a specific section on drug and alcohol misuse aimed at LGB people. Go to [www.lgf.org.uk](http://www.lgf.org.uk).

**[www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com).**

Website with advice and information about drug use.

## Smoking

**Stop! Team Leicester**

Go to [www.phleicester.org.uk/smoking.htm](http://www.phleicester.org.uk/smoking.htm) or call 0116 295 4141.

## Sexual Health

**Terence Higgins Trust**

Nationwide charity dedicated to tackling HIV/AIDS and improving the nation's sexual health. Their website contains many useful resources: [www.tht.org.uk](http://www.tht.org.uk).

**'Yes, You Do Need A Smear'**

Leaflet aimed at lesbian and bisexual women explaining the importance of regular smear tests - downloadable from [lgbthealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/smear\\_leaflet.pdf](http://lgbthealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/smear_leaflet.pdf)

## Transgender

**'Guidance for GPs, other clinicians and health professionals on the care of gender variant people'**

Department of Health guidance - downloadable from the Publications section of [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk).





This booklet has been produced as part of the **Pacesetters** programme to reduce health inequalities. It was developed by a steering group consisting of staff from **NHS Leicester City** (the operating name of Leicester City Primary Care Trust) , **Leicester LGBT Centre** and **Trade Sexual Health** and volunteers from **Prism**, the LGBT Forum for Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland. For further information and copies of this booklet please call **0116 295 1434** or email [equality@leicestercity.nhs.uk](mailto:equality@leicestercity.nhs.uk)