



Best practice principles on developing LGBT cultural competence in health and social care education



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Introduction

The BEING ME project aims to support the social inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) older people who use care and wellbeing services. As the population of Europe is ageing, more and more older people are in need of care and support. This will include older LGBT people, who often need more professional care and support as many may not have children or the traditional support networks of the general population. Research has demonstrated that older LGBT people experience social exclusion while interacting with care providers and that their life stories and relationships are overlooked and undervalued. In some cases, they experience direct discrimination within health and social care environments. Research also indicates an absence of focus on older LGBT people's health care needs within curricula content and academic textbooks, which results in health and social care providers being constrained in their ability to provide a culturally-sensitive and acceptable service to LGBT older people. There is also evidence that many educators lack the knowledge and skills to develop curricula that addresses, in an inclusive and affirmative manner, the health and social care needs of older LGBT people.

The BEING ME project endeavours to achieve this aim through positive interaction with educational institutions that prepare professionals to work with older people. By exchanging good practices, including good practice in teaching and learning and by developing tailored educational resources and pedagogies, the BEING ME team aim to improve the knowledge and competencies of future care professionals in the area of LGBT affirmative practices for older people. By enhancing skills, knowledge and competencies, practitioners will be in a position to develop a culture of support, openness and respect for LGBT identities, which is essential to older LGBT people's inclusiveness in care environments.

This document sets out 15 best practice principles on developing LGBT cultural competence in health and social care education. The purpose of the best practice principles is to support and empower educators working in health and social care to foster and develop strategies that promote older LGBT inclusion within health and social care curricula. The principles present some steps that educators can take to ensure that their teaching practice is reflective of the needs of older LGBT people. In addition, they present some guidance and specific strategies to ensure that students are aware of older LGBT people's needs when working and caring for older people generally. The best practice principles are informed by the LGBT literature, feedback from the LGBT community and the experiences of the people involved in the BEING ME project.

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For further information and specific teaching resources, please visit www.beingme.eu.

Acknowledge the importance of including LGBT issues within the curriculum

Health and social care practitioners need to be aware of the importance of inclusivity in their practice. Educators need to be able to set the context for learning about sexual and gender minority groups, and help learners to understand the issues that affect older LGBT people and the factors that increase their vulnerability to negative experiences in health care.

Integrate LGBT issues into the curriculum across all subjects/modules and assessment strategies, where possible

While stand-alone modules or content on LGBT issues will increase knowledge, stand-alone modules may reinforce the idea of LGBT people as a homogenous group. In addition, stand-alone content may perpetuate the 'otherness' that older LGBT are vulnerable to by seeing them as separate to the general population. LGBT issues need to be integrated into the curriculum in a meaningful way, and issues and concerns discussed in the context of all older people's experiences and needs rather than separate to them. In addition, integration allows students to be continually reminded of LGBT issues throughout their entire course of study, increasing the likelihood of learning being assimilated into practice.

Address the needs of all LGBT identities within the curriculum

Educators need to recognise that LGBT identities do not represent one homogenous group. LGBT people have diverse histories, experiences, needs and fears. Hence, the need for educators to ensure that teaching content and discussions take a life span approach, which not only takes account of each individual's experiences but also addresses the unique needs and vulnerabilities of each subgroup. In addition, educators need to acknowledge the historical, legal, socio-political, and economic context of LGBT people's lives and address how the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, religion and other minority statuses (e.g. migrant, traveller) may impact further on the experience of older LGBT people.

Use evidence on LGBT issues from reputable sources

As with any teaching and learning, educators need to be aware of the evidence. They should also be aware that evidence related to LGBT ageing and other LGBT issues has been the subject of debate, misinterpretation and misrepresentation, and that information needs to be obtained from reputable sources.

Develop curriculum content in collaboration with LGBT communities

Educators need to collaborate with and involve older LGBT adults in the design, planning and delivery of education for many reasons, including, increasing the visibility and empowerment of older LGBT adults, building trust between the community and service providers, facilitating experiential knowledge to be shared, and ensuring that education is appropriate and responsive to the community.

Be mindful that education on LGBT issues extends beyond the classroom into practice environments

Many health and social care programmes include practice-based elements. These learning environments also need to be inclusive and respect diversity. Staff working in practice need to be aware of the needs of older LGBT people and be able to augment and role model the LGBT affirmative practices that students learn in the classroom.

Create an inclusive learning environment from the beginning

From the outset educators need to create an inclusive learning environment that respects diversity within the group, including gender diversity. Educators might commence by introducing themselves and stating their preferred name and pronoun. This could then be followed by inviting students to tell their preferred name and pronoun. Educators need to think about how they may unconsciously reinforce binary views of gender in the learning space, by making statements about all men or all women or by breaking groups into male and female groups. Teaching resources and assessment strategies also need to be proofed to ensure that they do not perpetuate and reinforce heteronormativity or binary approaches towards gender.

Create an environment where everyone feels encouraged and supported to express views

Including LGBT issues in teaching could be considered a controversial subject as it has the potential to generate opposing views and heated debate arising from different cultural and religious beliefs. While educators need to listen to learners' beliefs, they also need to encourage critical thinking by asking probing questions to explore and analyse underlying assumptions, as well as inviting alternative viewpoints. By asking learners for evidence to support assertions, whether from theory, research, personal experience, or media, learners are enabled to recognise that a difference of opinion exists and to develop the ability to critique their arguments. More equitable discussion may be created by providing students with an opportunity to think about or write their own thoughts on a topic prior to a large group discussion.

Support learners to understand the source and impact of their own prejudices

Health and social care learners are microcosms of wider society, thus they may have been socialised to hold heteronormative, heterosexist and homophobic/biphobic/transphobic attitudes towards older LGBT people. Educators need to support learners to understand how prejudices are formed and recognise the potential impact of their prejudices on the way they work with older LGBT people. Using diverse teaching strategies learners should be enabled to address their possible prejudices at both a cognitive and emotional level, and supported to find positive means to address their prejudices.

Address stereotypes and problematic assumptions in a prompt and supportive manner

While it is important to encourage open expression of different perspectives and views around LGBT identities, discussion needs to be done in a manner that is respectful of all. Discussing LGBT issues may have unintended outcomes, such as tension and conflict between students who express different views, including offensive views, or the silencing of students who feel intimidated. It may be difficult to balance freedom of speech with challenging negative or problematic views about LGBT people. Including some information on classroom processes and expectations for discussing potentially sensitive issues in the course/module information may be helpful. Educators could preface any discussion on LGBT issues within the classroom with a discussion on ground rules and advise students to use these ground rules as a reference point for behaving appropriately during class discussion. Educators could also plan in advance how they might correct misinformation and challenge stereotypes or problematic views expressed by students. It is the educators' role to remind people of any equality legislation that exists and the codes of professional practice that governs the work of health and social care practitioners.

Be mindful of one's own views and how they might influence interactions with learners

Although educators may not always agree with the views expressed by learners, they need to model how to disagree in a respectful manner, as well as how to challenge ideas without being disrespectful to the person by putting them down. To create a respectful environment educators need to develop an awareness of their own taken-for-granted assumptions, which may lead them to unwittingly align themselves with certain students, or react in a particular manner. They also need to be mindful of their own emotions and reactions, and use this awareness to inform their planning of teaching and learning.

Support learners to develop cognitive and emotional competence by using a variety of teaching strategies

Developing learners' cultural competence in LGBT issues needs to move beyond knowledge and focus on personal beliefs and attitudes. While there is general agreement that didactic teaching methods are appropriate for imparting some factual information, in order to effect attitudinal change and increase learners' comfort and confidence, educators need to include a range of enquiry-based, interactive, pedagogical approaches that involve learners in their own learning. Thus, a variety of experiential learning methods, including reflective exercises, video, role play, case studies and group discussion have the potential to enhance self-awareness, understanding and the sensitivity skills required to work effectively with older LGBT people.

Set and agree ground rules to manage self-disclosure and curiosity

While self-disclosure by educators and learners may create a sense of belonging within the group, educators need to inform the group that self-disclosure is not an expectation and learners should only disclose if and when they feel safe. Learners who disclose issues around sexual orientation or gender identity should not be put into the role of 'educator', by being asked personal questions by the educator or other members of the group. It is also important to remind learners about the importance of confidentiality e.g. information disclosed in a group or classroom needs permission to be spoken about outside that context.

Respond to discomfort and distress in a sensitive and supportive manner

Grappling with new ideas or discussing issues that challenge people's views and prejudices will engender a certain degree of discomfort and this should be expected. However, educators need to be mindful that some learners may become upset, distressed, or feel offended by the content of the discussion or comments by other learners. Should this occur educators need to respond supportively and promptly. It may be appropriate to give the upset person time and space during the class session and to talk to the person in private after the session. Irrespective, it is important to remind the whole group of the ground rules set at the beginning of the discussion. Depending on the needs of the learner, it may be helpful to provide them with information on supports within or outside the educator's organisation, such as student counselling, LGBT phone lines or LGBT groups.

Evaluate teaching methods and approaches

As with all teaching, educators need to evaluate continually their teaching approaches and respond accordingly to ensure that they are meeting the needs of the students and that their teaching is reflective of older LGBT people's needs. Where possible, educators should endeavour to share best practices with others and contribute to the development of research evidence in the area of teaching and learning on the needs of older LGBT people.