Inclusive Language Vocabulary:
Gender and Sexual Orientation Edition

WASHINGTON Medical Commission
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Words have power. Choosing the right words in language is important as it can promote equity and create sense of belonging or be exclusionary and perpetuate stigma.

Effective communication is a fundamental skill for providers to be able to address the needs of diverse patient populations. Applying inclusive language is the hallmark of effective communication as it serves to foster positive patient-provider relationships. The term "inclusive language" is used to describe words or phrases that are neutral and free of discrimination based on a person's race or ethnicity, sexuality, gender, age, ability, or socioeconomic status.

Inclusive language creates a space where the patient/family feel valued and respected. When providers use inclusive language, it creates a space of trust and understanding, paving a way to positive therapeutic relationship. While unintentional, lack of sensitivity and care to use inclusionary language leads us to exclusion. Beyond limiting conversations, using inappropriate language may lead to health disparities. People who have negative experiences may avoid getting the necessary care leading to a delay in diagnoses and premature death. Languages also contributes to distrust in the medical system and avoidance of preventative measures critical to health.

Accepted inclusive terminology is ever evolving and utilizing the following three basic principles can be applied to remain respectful.

1. People first language: Place the person before their condition Ex. People with Disabilities.
2. Specific: Be as specific as possible (Instead of foreign born- state the specific country of birth).
3. Ask for relevant information: Avoid assumptions- ask your patient how they would like to be identified. More information can be found in this article "What are personal pronouns and why do they matter?"

The LGBTQ Stylebook, GLAAD Media Reference Guide - 11th Edition and Guidelines for the Primary and Gender-Affirming Care of Transgender and Gender Nonbinary People are excellent sources for accepted terminologies to help raise awareness and increase understanding around gender and sexual orientation identities and should be used as a reference to use consistent and respectful language.

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