

## **Tips for Coming Out to Your Doctor**

- Try to bring up the subject early on. It is much more difficult to come out to a doctor that has thought of you as straight for 10 years.
- Come out when you are less vulnerable. Ask your doctor for a few minutes to chat while you're still fully clothed. When you are naked wearing a paper dress may not be the best time to come out. You will feel more powerful and in control by coming out while you are fully clothed.
- Check them out first. Utilize available resources that list LGBT friendly healthcare providers, or ask your LGBT friends for referrals.
- Ask questions before you get there. If you are selecting a new provider you may be able to ask questions prior to making an appointment. When you call to make an appointment, ask if the practice has any LGBT patients. If you're nervous about asking, remember you don't have to give your name during that initial call. Below are three questions that may be helpful in selecting a LGBT-friendly provider:
  - "Do you have a nondiscrimination policy that includes sex, sexual orientation and gender?"
  - "Do you serve LGBT patients?"
  - "Have you or your staff ever been trained on LGBT health issues?"
- Slip it in. Sometimes it's best not to make a production number out of it. A savvy provider will pick up on your cue. Mention your partner in general conversation. Be prepared to address it head on if the provider asks you directly.
- Bring a friend. If you're uneasy about being open with your healthcare provider, consider asking a trusted friend to come with you.
- Know what to ask. Learn about the specific healthcare issues facing LGBT people and specific to your own healthcare situation.
- Lastly, be patient with yourself and your provider. Only you can judge whether it will be safe to come out to your provider. Be aware that you may be the first "out" person they have encountered. Their first reaction may not be the best reaction — or their last reaction. Be clear however, that no one has the right to make you feel uncomfortable by asking voyeuristic or mocking questions. Keep in mind that your provider may not remember at your annual physical that you came out to him/her last time — particularly if that information is not part of your permanent medical record.
- If the reaction is negative then you possess the legal right to complain, or change doctors.

Some Cautions: IT MAY NOT BE SAFE for you to come out to your health care provider. Think about these questions before making a decision:

- Are you able to choose your health care provider? Can you switch health care providers if you are not happy?
- Do you have reasons to believe your health care provider might treat you poorly if you came out?
- How might you deal with curious, ignorant or negative responses?
- Do you have friends, family or a partner who can help you make this decision and support you through it? Could one of them come with you to your visit?

- Laws about confidentiality vary. Do you know the health care provider's confidentiality and information sharing policies? Who might see your records?
- Many U.S. insurance companies exclude health care coverage to people who are undergoing medical sex reassignment. Disclosure about your transgender status may be risky if it becomes part of your medical record.

Adapted from resources provided by The Mautner Project  
([http://www.shecircle.org/comingout\\_doctor.php](http://www.shecircle.org/comingout_doctor.php)) and HRC  
(<http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/coming-out-to-your-doctor>)