

## **Why Come Out to Your Doctor?**

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender patients and their healthcare providers have maintained an unofficial "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. This policy, which is primarily based on fear on both sides, endangers our health. Providers mistakenly believe that if they ask their patients "do you have sex with men, women, or both", they will offend the 75-year-old, presumably heterosexual grandmother.

On the other side of the equation lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender patients are afraid — sometimes rightly so — of being rejected by their provider, breaches in confidentiality, stigmatization, maltreatment, etc. Other times we just feel it's no body's business. Unfortunately this silent conspiracy does a disservice to both sides of the healthcare partnership and sets the stage for sub-optimal healthcare.

Benefits of coming out to your provider may include;

- It increases your health care provider's understanding of you and your life. If the provider knows about your sexual behavior, you are more likely to get accurate medical information.
- It is often stressful to be lesbian or bisexual because of society's fear and ignorance. Your health care provider needs to know about the stresses in your life in order to help diagnose any problems you might have.
- Coming out lets your health care provider know who is important to you, who to contact in an emergency and (if you have a "durable power of attorney for health care") who makes health care decisions for you in an emergency.
- Your partner can be respected as more than "just a friend." Your partner/family can be included in discussions and treatment plans.
- It takes a lot of energy to be in the closet. When you're open about your life, you can focus on your health, not on hiding.

Coming out as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender can be a frightening and liberating experience at the same time. The decision may require serious thought on your part. We've compiled a list of some things to consider when deciding whether to come out to your healthcare provider as well as some tips you can use in your coming out process.

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>)