

northwest Cultural Competency

Multnomah County observes National LGBT Health Awareness Week

by Malka Geffen

The fifth annual National LGBTQ Health Awareness Week begins March 11.

To commemorate the effort of the National Coalition for LGBT Health, Multnomah County is partnering with Q Center, Kaiser Permanente, Cascade AIDS Project, Breathe Free, Outside In, Elder Resource Alliance, Triangle Project, Brother to Brother, Hambleton Project and Oregon Health & Science University's Partnership Project to present the Meaningful Care Conference on March 16. The event aims to provide education on best practices for providers to increase culturally appropriate health care for members of the sexual and gender minorities community.

Unlike last year's panel, which drew only 30 people, this year's Meaningful Care Conference is a much bigger effort expected to have 180 attendees, according to Matthew Lashua, community relations liaison for Multnomah County Commissioner Maria Rojo de Steffey.

"My interest in the health issues of the GLBTQ community started many years ago when I heard a young man's story of a friend who had committed suicide because he was gay and couldn't tell his parents," said Rojo, who is sponsoring the event. "When I got this job, I thought that if I can do anything to help GLBTQ kids in particular, that I would do that."

Though she does not claim to be an expert on the issues of health disparities, Rojo said she is

sponsoring and will attend the conference to learn what else she can do.

"We're talking about ways homophobia and transphobia affect people's lives," said Graham Harriman. "By addressing how we take care of our health, we can address our quality of life, which is incredibly important."

Harriman, a gay man living with HIV, serves as co-chairman of Multnomah County Health Department's diversity and quality team. "Our panels will share best practices in applying health care and will focus on mental health and addiction, transgender medical issues, transgender mental health, senior issues, lesbian health and the health needs of men who have sex with men," he said.

The Kaiser Permanente medical group has donated the use of its town hall for the event and is sponsoring the keynote speaker, Dr. Judy Lively.

"I'm very excited about our keynote speaker. Lively is a physician and chief of Kaiser Permanente Diablo Medical Center of Northern California," said Harriman. "She's an M.D. who transitioned on the job and is very well-respected in the field as a physician who treats transgender patients."

According to April Lewis, a lesbian who serves as regional diversity manager for Kaiser Permanente Northwest, Lively and her partner, registered nurse Karen Lively, will hold a breakout session focusing on providing health care to transgender patients and their families.

"Dr. Lively was a big instigator for our policy for employees who transition on the job," said Lewis. "It's been adopted by all Kaisers to help a person to transition successfully while working."

Also speaking to the issues of transgender health is Red

Hoffman, a volunteer physician for the Trans Clinic of Outside In. "There is no reason that any family doctor, internist, naturopath or nurse practitioner could not effectively care for all of the needs of their trans patients," said Hoffman. "On the flip side, I understand that some providers are not interested in managing hormones. I hope to introduce these providers to the myriad of ways in which they can practice what I like to call trans-positive medicine."

Hoffman's presentation will include an introduction to the language of the trans community with suggestions on how to incorporate this language into providers' practices. She will explain the medical and surgical options available to trans people as well as the barriers that exist around accessing this care. Finally, she will discuss the resources available for both trans folk and providers in Portland and on the Internet.

"A little cultural competency can go a long way," Hoffman said. "One doesn't need to 'specialize' in transgender medicine or surgery in order to

be a great asset to the trans community."

Participating in the mental health and addictions panel is Gillian Leichtling, research associate of behavioral health at RMC Research and a Q Center volunteer. She will discuss the climate of mental health and addictions agencies' treatment programs.

"Often in substance abuse treatment, there is the idea that it's enough for a clinician to be nice and liberal and that they don't need specific training around why it's important to know clients' sexual orientation or behaviors in terms of their addictions," said Leichtling. "I hope people come away from the conference with knowledge about how to create a culture within their agency that's really LGBTQ-supportive rather than just tolerant." 

THE MEANINGFUL CARE CONFERENCE will be held from 8 a.m. to noon March 16 at Kaiser Town Hall, 3704 N. Interstate Ave. To register visit www.multnomah-county.ennevent.com/MeaningfulCare. CEU and CME certification is available.



Beginning last summer, a community coalition of nonprofit and county staff has been organizing the Meaningful Care Conference.

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