Commemorating Pride: Reflecting on Progress and Continuing to Advocate for Gender Diverse and Sexual Minority Youth

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning (LGBTQ) Pride Month is marked with parades, demonstrations, workshops, and other events to recognize the local and global impact of LGBTQ individuals. This month also reminds us to honor those within the LGBTQ community who we have lost and reflect on our past and present struggles for human rights. Our history is rich in examples of how the LGBTQ community has fought for these rights: Compton Cafeteria Riots in San Francisco, Stonewall Riots in New York, demonstrations by the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power to prompt governmental response for the AIDS epidemic, and the fight for same-sex marriage. This list is not exhaustive, but these and other historical movements remind us of how far the community has come. As the LGBTQ community faces ongoing barriers to maintain rights and acquire new ones, we have daily reminders of how much further we have to go.

As a field, Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine’s mission is to promote the optimal health and well-being of all adolescents and young adults. Despite being incredibly resilient, sexual minority and gender diverse youth are disproportionately affected by poor medical and psychosocial outcomes. To commemorate this year’s LGBTQ Pride, the Journal of Adolescent Health has published a series of articles that further contribute to our understanding of the health of gender diverse and sexual minority youth. This month’s issue highlights the critical role that research focused on promoting the health for LGBTQ youth plays in the ongoing fight for equality.

This issue features a diverse range of research studies that focus on the health of sexual minority and gender diverse youth. In Cafferty et al.’s study, they survey youth attending local pride festivities to assess how these youth are asked about sexual history and offered sexually transmitted infection screening during visits with their primary care providers [1]. How the authors approach conducting research focused on sexual minority adolescence in this novel venue could have implications for future research, intervention development, and health promotion. Hightow-Weidman et al.’s study examines risk factors for condomless anal sex in young HIV-positive men who have sex with men with detectable viral loads [2]. HIV has disproportionately affected the LGBTQ community. This study identifies factors that need to be further targeted in sexual minority youth to reduce the rates of new HIV infections and ultimately eradicate the disease.

This month’s issue also highlights articles that center on gender-affirming care for gender diverse youth. Notably, the Society of Adolescent Health and Medicine released its first position paper focused solely on the care, support, and advocacy for gender diverse youth in this issue [3]. In addition to calling on clinicians to optimize gender-affirming care for these youth, the position statement also emphasizes the need for increased evidence-based research studies focused on this population. This issue features such research. For example, Lai et al. provide a review of fertility considerations for gender diverse youth and the complexities regarding the desire for fertility preservation, rates of fertility preservation in this population, and challenges in providing evidence-based counseling to youth and their families [4]. In addition, a case series written by Insogna et al. details the experiences with oocyte cryopreservation in transgender males who had been on various gender-affirming medication regimens [5]. These two studies are particularly pertinent, as there is a growing number of gender diverse youth presenting for gender-affirming care [6–8]. A study by Price-Feeney et al. further iterates that gender diverse youth are vulnerable to poor mental health outcomes [9]. Unlike previous studies exploring mental health disparities for gender diverse youth, this study compared gender diverse youth with cisgender LGBTQ youth, and gender diverse youth were at higher risk for depression and suicidality. The aforementioned studies are just some examples of studies published in this month’s issue that focus on ongoing research highlighting health and psychosocial issues facing sexual minority and gender diverse youth.

Although there has been significant progress for the LGBTQ community and for the health and well-being of
sexual minority and gender diverse youth, there are still significant barriers to overcome. For example, gender diverse individuals continue to be victimized and murdered, and transgender women of color are disproportionately experiencing this violence. Moreover, the U.S. government is enacting policies that would embolden clinical providers to refuse care for individuals because of their gender identity or sexual identity. Some of these policies justify such discrimination under the guise of religious freedom. In addition, gender-affirming care for gender diverse youth is being threatened with legislation proposed in multiple U.S. states. Some of the proposed legislation would ban clinicians from providing gender-affirming medications and surgeries, under penalty of license revocation or even prison time. These efforts threaten access to gender-affirming care that can be lifesaving.

LGBTQ Pride Month is a time of celebration but is also a time to continue to march toward justice and equality. A key part of this movement is continuing to conduct rigorous research to optimize health outcomes for sexual minority and gender diverse youth. This movement also involves advocacy at local, state, federal, and international levels to promote policies that benefit these youth and combat policies that threaten their well-being and right to equality. As clinicians and researchers in Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine, we play a pivotal role in this movement to support LGBTQ youth in thriving and having personal pride.

References