

Allergy and Clinical Immunology Unit, Center for the Diagnosis and Treatment of Osteoporosis
ASL Teramo
Teramo, Italy

Technical Group for the Coordination of Gender Medicine
Regione Abruzzo, Italy

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State of Transgender Health Education and Provision of Gender-Affirming Care to Transgender and Gender Diverse Adolescents



The Authors respond:

We agree with Sirufo and colleagues: there is a critical need to expand provider education and training to make gender-affirming care more accessible to transgender and gender diverse (TGD) adolescents, especially given access to this care has been associated with improved mental health [1,2].

To improve access to this care, which many adolescents today experience notable barriers to receiving, we suggest improved transgender health education for medical trainees and practicing providers and increased advocacy against legislation banning gender-affirming care. When it is offered, transgender health content in medical education is often delivered as a single, elective session for undergraduate medical students [3] and rarely assesses provider-level knowledge retention or clinical skills [4]. Instead, this content should be integrated into required curricula over multiple sessions for medical trainees of all levels, measure knowledge and skill retention and, ultimately, its impact on patient-level outcomes. We must also develop opportunities for providers currently in practice to receive education and consultation in this area, as few were taught about transgender health in their training programs. Finally, providers must advocate for ongoing access to evidence-based care for TGD youth, which is currently under attack in the United States (US) and worldwide.

Since January 2022, 15 US states have passed bills to limit access to gender-affirming care. Alabama and Arkansas enacted laws prohibiting the provision of gender-affirming medications (e.g., puberty blockers, hormones) for adolescents. Arizona banned gender-affirming surgeries for minors. Directives in Texas considered the provision of gender-affirming care child abuse. Although the laws and directives in Alabama, Arkansas, and Texas are temporarily blocked, future access to care for adolescents in these states remains uncertain.

Anti-transgender legislation is discriminatory and threatens TGD adolescents' health and well-being by increasing societal stigma. This legislation prevents TGD adolescents from receiving

care that improves mental health [2] and is supported by every major medical organization including the Society of Adolescent Health and Medicine [5]. Many bills threaten to criminalize providers for delivering medically recommended care, leaving them with the decision to either (1) provide evidence-based care to their patients and risk criminalization or (2) do harm by withholding care to avoid risking their medical license and/or receiving criminal charges [6]. Because anti-transgender bills are expected to increase in upcoming legislative sessions, all providers must engage with TGD youth, their families, and their communities to advocate for making gender-affirming care more accessible for adolescents, not less [5].

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Taylor L. Boyer, M.P.H.
Center for Health Equity Research and Promotion
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Department of Behavioral and Community Health Sciences, School
of Public Health
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Robert W.S. Coulter, Ph.D., M.P.H.
Elizabeth Miller, M.D., Ph.D.

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Department of Behavioral and Community Health Sciences, School
of Public Health
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Department of Pediatrics, School of Medicine
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine
UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Kacie M. Kidd, M.D., M.S.
Department of Pediatrics
West Virginia University School of Medicine
Morgantown, West Virginia

Gina M. Sequeira, M.D., M.S.
School of Medicine
University of Washington
Seattle, Washington

Division of Adolescent Medicine
Seattle Children's Hospital
Seattle, Washington

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