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Healthcare Satisfaction of Sexual Minority Athletes in the Athletic Training Setting

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OBJECTIVE

Sexual minority athletes may have different experiences in sports when compared with their heterosexual counterparts. Many have reported negative experiences with their healthcare providers because of their sexual orientation.¹⁻³ The objective of this study was to determine how sexual minority patients of athletic trainers describe their healthcare experiences.

DESIGN

This was a phenomenological qualitative study.

SETTING

Semi-structured interviews conducted by phone.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were selected for an interview based on their responses in an initial online survey. Participants needed to be at least 18 years old, identify as a sexual minority, participated in sports within the last five years, and had access to an athletic trainer. Ten participants (n=10), including males (n=4) and females (n=6) were interviewed. Participants either currently participated in collegiate sports (n=4), formerly participated in collegiate sports (n=2), formerly participated in high school sports (n=1), currently participated in club sports (n=1), formerly participated in club sports (n=1), or formerly participated in semi-professional sports (n=1). Mean age was 23±4.47 years. The participants identified as lesbian (n=5), gay (n=2), bisexual (n=1), and asexual (n=2).

INTERVENTION

Semi-structured interview focused on sexual minority patient's experiences in the athletic training facility.

MAIN OUTCOME MEASURES

Interviews were conducted until data saturation was reached. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for common themes. Themes were checked with a peer reviewer and member checking was completed to validate findings.

RESULTS

Three themes were identified. Two, *Knowledge* and *Equality of Treatment* were related to the athletic trainer and one, *Experience*, was related to the patient. Athletic trainer *Knowledge* describes how educated the athletic trainer was on sexual minority issues and how well they communicated with sexual minority patients. *Equality of Treatment* refers to the athletic trainer's ability to provide quality care to each patient, regardless of sexual orientation. Patient *Experience* consists of three sub-themes: Comfort, Safety, and Relevance. Comfort describes how at ease the patient feels in the athletic training facility. Safety describes whether the patient feels unable to seek healthcare due to fear of harassment. Relevance describes if the patient feels their sexual orientation was important to their care.

CONCLUSION

Athletic trainers have the opportunity to provide an inclusive environment for all patients. Athletic trainers should seek opportunities to educate themselves on sexual minority issues and learn how to communicate effectively with their sexual

minority patients.⁴ Lastly, athletic trainers can establish clear policies in their facilities to prevent discrimination or maltreatment of any patient in order to make the athletic training facility a welcoming place for all patients.

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KEY WORDS: *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Inclusive, Cultural Competence*