PROJECT INFORMATION

July 2018

Comparing Ways to Ask Patients about Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in the Emergency Room - The EQUALITY Study

Principal investigator

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Organization

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What was the research about?

Hospitals do not usually collect information about people's sexual orientation and gender identity, or SO/GI. People who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer—sometimes called sexual and gender minorities, or SGM—have said it is important for doctors to know their identities to provide good care. The research team wanted to find the best way to ask all patients for this information.

In this study, the research team compared two ways to ask patients about their SO/GI in the emergency room, or ER. In one method, a nurse asked the patient. In the other method, the patient filled out a form. The team then gave a survey to a smaller group of patients about their comfort in sharing SO/GI information during their ER visits.

What were the results?

Patients who identified as SGM were more comfortable filling out a form than giving answers to a nurse. Patients who did not identify as SGM were equally comfortable with either way.

Who was in the study?

During the study, 198,137 patients went to one of four ERs in the Northeastern United States. Of these, 19,742 patients gave verbal information about SO/GI, and 3,630 patients filled out a form. The research team then gave a survey to 180 patients who were

SGM and to 180 patients who did not identify as SGM about how comfortable they felt in the ER. The team also asked another 180 patients who did not answer questions about SO/GI about their comfort in the ER.

What did the research team do?

For a six-month period, ER nurses asked patients about their SO/GI. Then, for the next six months, ER staff gave patients hospital intake forms with SO/GI questions. After each six-month period, the team asked a smaller group of patients about their comfort with sharing SO/GI information with hospital staff.

What were the limits of the study?

The hospitals in the study were in the Northeastern United States. Results may differ in other locations. The study didn't include patients who chose "other" for SO/GI. Also, the study didn't include patients who didn't speak English or who had a mental health condition. Not including these patients could have changed the results. Nurses may have talked only to patients they thought would answer the questions. Asking only some patients may also have changed the results.

Future research could look at how hospitals and their staff decide how to ask about SO/GI with all patients. Future studies could also include patients who don't use common SO/GI labels and patients with mental health conditions.

How can people use the results?

Hospital staff can use these results to design a process to ask patients about SO/GI. Regularly asking all

patients about SO/GI may make patients feel more comfortable sharing this information.

To learn more about this project, visit www.pcori.org/Haider125.