



NATIONAL CENTERS OF  
**EXCELLENCE**  
IN WOMEN'S HEALTH

## Lesbian Health

December 2000

OFFICE ON WOMEN'S HEALTH  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
AND HUMAN SERVICES

The National Centers of Excellence in Women's Health (CoE's) were established by the Office on Women's Health within the Department of Health and Human Services in 1996. Their mandate is to establish and evaluate a new model health care system that unites women's health research, medical training, clinical care, public health education, community outreach, and the promotion of women in academic medicine around a common mission – to improve the health status of diverse women across the life span.

Caring for diverse women includes a focus on the health and well-being of lesbian women. This brochure highlights activities and programs at the CoEs that address the specific health care concerns of lesbian women.

### **Medical School Curricula and Training**

- ◆ The MCP-Hahnemann School of Medicine conducts a Lesbian Health Workshop as part of its problem-based curriculum. This workshop is a two-hour interactive student workshop, that consists of an individual assessment exercise, a videotape analysis, and a didactic. In addition to this workshop, students discuss the issues surrounding lesbian health in their small-group learning sessions over a week-long period. The second lecture on lesbian health is placed in the Pediatrics Clerkship. The format of the lecture is a case conference and is targeted towards junior clerks, but is also attended by Pediatrics and Family Medicine house staff. The goal of this conference is to give students and residents information and to aid them in developing an approach to families whose experiences may be different from the traditional approach. Contact MCP Hahnemann CoE: 215-842-7041

- ◆ As part of the Ambulatory Care Curriculum, Boston University presents a two-hour curriculum to third year medical students. The objectives of the curriculum are for the student to 1) become comfortable and gain competency in obtaining a sexual history of all patients, and 2) become aware of special medical and psychosocial issues that gay/lesbian patients may have. The curriculum covers the epidemiology of sexual practices and behaviors, psychosocial issues in gay/lesbian patients, the fundamentals of taking a sexual history, medical issues in the gay male patient, medical issues in the lesbian patient, and a list of references. Contact: BU CoE: 617-638-8035
- ◆ Magee-Womens Hospital has made a conscious effort to address lesbian issues in several ways. They have co-sponsored (with the YWCA, Family Health Council and the Lesbian Health Collective) seminars in lesbian issues. One seminar informed lesbians in the community about their own health needs and identified Magee as a lesbian-competent health environment. Another seminar informed health care providers of lesbian issues and addressed issues of sensitivity. Magee also continues to work with the YWCA, accepting referrals from their lesbian health program and the Lesbian Health Collective by identifying speakers for monthly community presentations. Contact: Magee CoE: 412-641-6052
- ◆ The University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, which is affiliated with the Magee CoE, requires first year students to attend three orientation workshops on diversity of which one focuses on gay and lesbian issues. In addition, there is a consultant to some departments that gives diversity sessions to house staff. In addition, the Department of Women's Studies at OSU offers two undergraduate courses and one graduate course which include lesbian health in the curriculum. These classes are

Women's Health Issues, Lesbian Lives, and Action in Women's Health. Contact: Magee CoE: 412-641-6052

- ◆ UCLA's Center of Excellence is a leader in undergraduate and medical student education on lesbian issues. Key personnel of the CoE developed a proposed curriculum for *Health Care Issues for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Patients*, an upper division undergraduate course offered under the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender minor field of study, and helped develop a UCLA Medical School Doctoring course module which examines the medical and biopsychosocial issues of the evaluation of a breast lump in a lesbian woman. Key personnel are also leading a Working Group on Women's Health appointed by the UCLA Medical Education Committee which will assess the current curriculum in the first two years of medical school as it related to lesbian issues. In addition, CoE personnel are course chairs for *Topics in Women and Medicine*, an upper division Women's Studies undergraduate course, which includes a session on marginalized populations, including lesbians, and addresses lesbian health issues throughout the course. Contact: UCLA CoE: 800-825-2631
- ◆ The UCSF CoE has been working to develop a curriculum on lesbian women's health, which is targeted towards first or second year medical school students. The curriculum will highlight what is known about lesbian women's health and will heighten awareness among providers of this often-ignored population. In addition, medical students at UCSF are currently exposed to education on lesbian health issues during the first, second and third years of training. In the first year, a panel of lesbian and gay health care providers speaks to all students regarding unique issues of lesbian and gay health. Second year students discuss a case of a lesbian presenting with menopausal symptoms during

their required “Introduction to Clinical Medicine” course. During the required obstetrics and gynecology clinical rotation, many third year students receive a one-hour lecture on lesbian health. Contact: UCSF CoE: 415-885-7273

- ◆ The University of Michigan includes a lengthy segment on sexuality in the first year medical school curriculum. The topics covered are sexuality issues in clinical practice, sexual history, sexual orientation and gender identification, and a sexuality case discussion. Each of the segments is coupled with a small group discussion or some type of field experience. Contact: University of Michigan CoE: 734-763-6424
- ◆ The medical school curriculum at Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center currently includes lectures on health issues for gays and lesbians. The Foundation of Clinical Medicine course contains a lecture on interviewing gay and lesbian patients. Also, during one of the small group meetings, students practice taking a sexual history using clinical scenarios which include gay and lesbian patients. A local Lesbian Health Resource Center has offered to provide an educational program for medical students. The Wake Forest CoE is also working to include a program on the health and treatment issues of gays and lesbians in the curriculum. Contact: Wake Forest CoE: 336-713-4420
- ◆ The Center Director of the Yale CoE developed the Lesbian Health curriculum for the “Women’s Health in the Medical School Curriculum” project sponsored by HRSA, NIH, and OWH. The curriculum addresses the unique medical and psychological needs of lesbians and the difference that may occur in the areas of sexuality, transmitted diseases, HIV infection, cancer, reproduction and parenting, as well as psychosocial issues including identity formation, social support, substance use, and

anti-lesbian violence. In addition, lesbian health care is included in the Women's Health Curriculum for first year students at the School of Medicine. Contact: Yale CoE: 203-737-5820

- ◆ At the University of Wisconsin, lectures on the unique health care issues for lesbians are included in the Fellow and Resident curricula. In addition, lesbian issues are being included in CoE efforts to increase cultural sensitivity in the Medical School curriculum. Contact University of Wisconsin CoE: 608-267-5568
- ◆ A Gay and Lesbian Studies curriculum is under development in Women's Studies program at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Contact: University of Illinois CoE: 312-413-1924

### **Research**

- ◆ The University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health, has conducted a large survey study, "Epidemiologic Study of Health Risks (ESTHER) in Lesbians." They have analyzed data from health surveys completed by 1,158 women. ESTHER investigators are currently conducting focus groups with the assistance of the Magee-Womens Hospital Center of Excellence. Contact: Magee CoE: 412-641-6052
- ◆ Researchers at Ohio State University are currently working on a number of projects including: a comparison of the health status and health risks of lesbian and heterosexual women, which will contribute to the Chicago Women's Health Survey; a study on body image of lesbian women as it relates to self-esteem, eating disorders, and other health issues; a study on HIV/AIDS and lesbian women; and a study on how social context and identity formation affects health status. Contact Ohio State CoE: 614-293-6937

- ◆ Examples of current research at UCLA on lesbian issues includes the forthcoming publication, *Predictors for Disclosure of Sexual Orientation and Receipt of Preventative Health Care Services by Lesbian and Bisexual Women*; the forthcoming publication, *Self-Identified Lesbians Lifetime and Recent Sexual History With Men and the Implications for Health Screening*, and the paper, *Do Lesbian and Bisexual Women Worry About HIV and Engage in Risk Prevention Behaviors?* which was presented at the “Women and HIV” conference in May 1997 in Pasadena, CA. Contact: UCLA CoE: 800-825-2631
  
- ◆ UCSF established in 1999, the Center for Lesbian Health Research in the Institute for Health & Aging. The CoE is a co-sponsor of the Center. There are currently at least fifteen UCSF researchers actively interested in and pursuing research in lesbian health at UCSF. The methodological orientation of these researchers includes behavioral science, outcomes research, epidemiology, biostatistics, policy, and qualitative methods. Examples of studies include: *Breast Cancer Risk Factors: Lesbian and Heterosexual Women*, S.L. Dibble and S. Roberts, Co-PIs; *Disclosure of Sexual Orientation to Health Care Providers*, M. VanDam, et al.; *Types of Health Care Providers Sought by Lesbians in Comparison with Heterosexual Women*, L. Cragin, et al.; *Differences in Breast Cancer Treatment: Lesbian and Heterosexual Women*, S.L. Dibble, PI; *The Female-to-Female HIV Transmission Study*, Cynthia Gomez, Co-Investigator. Contact: UCSF CoE: 415-885-7273
  
- ◆ On April 8, the Center for Lesbian Health, the UCSF CoE, and the Center for Gender Equity co-sponsored the first Lesbian Health Research Day. Over 40 physicians, nurse researchers and social and behavioral science researchers attended. Seven new research areas were identified and

collaborating teams created. The Center for Lesbian Health Research will assist potential researchers in providing pre-grant support with applications and facilitate future workshops.  
Contact: UCSF CoE: 415-885-7273

- ◆ Harvard participates in the Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Health Research Community Forum (FCHC). Contact: Harvard CoE: 617-732-8798
- ◆ CoE affiliated faculty members at the University of Wisconsin are conducting research and have published data on barriers to breast cancer screening in lesbians. Contact UW CoE: 608-267-5568
- ◆ The University of Illinois at Chicago has been active in addressing health needs and concerns of lesbian and bisexual women. Beginning in 1993, the Center for Research on Women and Gender worked with the Chicago Lesbian Community Cancer Project to develop the Chicago Women's Health Survey, which recruited almost 500 women, including lesbians and a matched comparison group of heterosexual women. This survey has been replicated in Minneapolis, MN, New York, NY, Columbus, OH, and most recently Las Vegas, NV, and UIC is compiling results into a national database. Other researchers are currently conducting comparative studies of lesbian and heterosexual women on risk factors and patterns of alcohol use and investigating issues of lesbian mental health. Contact: U of I CoE: 312-413-1924
- ◆ The Wake Forest University Women's Health Center of Excellence conducted a lesbian focus group as part of our women's health needs assessment and included lesbian women's concerns in the development of a gender-specific patient satisfaction questionnaire. Contact: WFU CoE: 336-713-4420

- ◆ In an effort to create a gender-specific patient care satisfaction instrument, the Boston University CoE collaborated with five other CoEs in conducting focus groups to assess the important aspects of patient satisfaction. In addition to participating in a collaborative qualitative evaluation of all focus groups conducted, the BU CoE has conducted its own qualitative evaluation of the focus groups run by the BU CoE addressing lesbian health issues. This project was accepted for poster presentation at the Society of General Internal Medicine Annual Meeting in 1999. Contact: BU CoE: 617-638-7428

### **Clinical Services**

- ◆ Magee-Womens Hospital has developed intake materials that do not assume that a woman's partner is male. While services are offered to lesbians at all sites, as they are to all women, there is also one clinic that is designated "lesbian competent," which is communicated by symbols in the windows that are recognizable to lesbians, literature that features lesbian couples, an availability of female providers, and lesbian focused intake materials. In addition, lesbians are included in Magee's non-discrimination statement. Contact: Magee CoE: 412-641-6052
- ◆ At UCSF, lesbian-sensitive clinical services are available both at the integrated primary care and OB/GYN Women's Health practices and at the WomenCare Mental Health Clinic. These clinical services have several lesbian health care practitioners and strive to provide a lesbian-friendly environment with, for example, intake forms that do not presume heterosexuality. Contact UCSF CoE: 415-885-7273
- ◆ The Tulane/Xavier CoE is developing relationships with primary care providers who specifically focus on lesbian health. Contact: TUXCoE: 877-588-5100

- ◆ The Boston University CoE provides outreach to the lesbian population around the availability of free breast and cervical cancer screening to un- and underinsured women – a common problem for lesbians not able to be insured through their partner’s policy. Contact BU CoE: 617-638-8035
- ◆ The Women’s Health Group at the BU CoE provides lesbian-sensitive clinical services. An atmosphere of acceptance is reiterated through the use of an intake form which does not assume heterosexuality. Contact BU CoE: 617-638-8035
- ◆ At Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, a Harvard affiliated teaching hospital, focus groups with lesbian patients were conducted to improve services. Also, a listing of lesbian and lesbian friendly physicians and other health practitioners is maintained. Contact: Harvard CoE: 617-732-8798
- ◆ The University of Illinois at Chicago is working with a community health center to open a lesbian clinic in a nearby suburb. Contact: U of I CoE: 312-413-1924

### **Community Outreach and Resources**

- ◆ Magee -Womens Hospital has co-sponsored (with the YWCA & Family Health Council) seminars in lesbian issues. One seminar informed lesbians in the community about their own health needs and identified Magee as a lesbian-friendly health environment. Another seminar informed health care providers of lesbian issues and addressed issues of sensitivity. Magee also continues to work with the YWCA, accepting referrals from their lesbian health program. Contact: Magee CoE: 412-641-6052
- ◆ University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, affiliated with the Magee CoE, hosted a booth on lesbian health issues during

Primary Care Day. Additionally, the Lesbian Health Collective, a group of university physicians, therapists, nurses, researchers, and others from the community, host monthly talks on lesbian health issues. Contact: Magee CoE: 412-641-6052

- ◆ Representatives of the lesbian community are involved in ongoing community alliance activities sponsored by the UCLA CoE. The UCLA CoE refers women to the UCLA Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Campus Resource Center, which provides direct services to student, faculty, staff, and their family and friends. Contact: UCLA CoE: 800-825-2631
- ◆ The Wake Forest CoE includes lesbian resources on their on-line health resource referral list for providers and the community. Additionally, the Wake Forest CoE has identified the lack of representation from the lesbian community on their Community Advisory Board and is working to address this gap. Contact: 336-713-4420
- ◆ The UCSF CoE refers women to the Center for Gender Equity which coordinates and co-sponsors outreach activities for the campus community and beyond including, for example panels of “out” lesbian and gay health care providers, speakers on a wide variety of lesbian and gay health topics. The UCSF Center for Gender Equity, with the City of San Francisco, sponsored an all day conference on Lesbian, Bi, Transsexual Women’s Health, and a reception for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students, faculty, staff, partners, and allies. The CoE highlights information regarding the programs of the Center for Gender Equity through its dissemination network. Contact: UCSF CoE: 415-885-7273
- ◆ The Tulane Xavier Center is developing relationships with community groups, including the University of New Orleans’

Women's Resource Center, who specifically focuses on lesbian health issues. Contact: TUXCoE: 877-588-5100

- ◆ The Harvard-affiliated teaching hospitals have several outreach activities and resources including: a Lesbian and Gay Health Resource Guide at Beth Israel; Lesbian and Gay Employee advisory groups at Massachusetts General and Beth Israel; Lesbian and Gay Health Conference for the community and health professionals at Beth Israel, and a Hotline at Massachusetts General. Also, a town meeting addressing gay and lesbian issues was held at the Harvard Medical School. Contact: Harvard CoE: 617-732-8798
- ◆ Also affiliated with Harvard, the Fenway Community Health Center has developed many programs, such as: SASSIE (Sisters Acquiring Safer Sex Information and Education) Project, dedicated to decreasing the transmission of HIV and STDs among women of color who have sex with women; Lesbian/Gay Family and Parenting Services, which organizes education, support and advocacy services for l/g/b/t prospective parents, parents, and children; a support group for Lesbians with cancer; psychotherapy groups for Lesbians; and the Violence Recovery Program, a program for l/g/b/t victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and hate crimes. Contact: Harvard CoE: 617-732-8798
- ◆ Members of the CoE faculty at the University of Wisconsin have been meeting with the community- based Lesbian Issues Task Force to discuss and assess health issues and needs. Currently, there are educational seminars scheduled, which will be co-sponsored by the CoE on cancer risks for lesbians. Contact: UW CoE: 608-267-5568
- ◆ The University of Illinois at Chicago hosted "Creating Healthy

Lives: A Conference on Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Health," sponsored by the Regional DHHS OWH and directed by the Lesbian Community Cancer Project. Proceedings will be available. Contact: U of I CoE: 312-413-1924

- ◆ Also at the University of Illinois at Chicago, the Office of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns supports the needs of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) students, faculty and staff. The office is a resource for anyone on campus who wants to know more about GLBT life and culture, or who wants to discuss GLBT-related issues or concerns; it has a library with over 750 books and 125 videos. Contact: U of I CoE: 312-413-1924

**NATIONAL CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE IN WOMEN'S HEALTH  
DECEMBER 2000**

- Boston University Medical Center, Boston, MA, Phone:  
617-638-8035, Internet: [www.bmc.org/coewh/](http://www.bmc.org/coewh/)
- University of California at Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA, Phone:  
800-825-2631, Internet: [www.med.ucla.edu/womens/](http://www.med.ucla.edu/womens/)
- University of California, San Francisco, San Francisco, CA,  
Phone: 415-885-7273, Internet: [www.itsa.ucsf.edu/~ucsfcoe/](http://www.itsa.ucsf.edu/~ucsfcoe/)
- Harvard University, Boston, MA, Phone: 617-732-8798,  
Internet: [www.hmcnet.harvard.edu/coe/](http://www.hmcnet.harvard.edu/coe/)
- University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL, Phone:  
312-413-1924, Internet:  
[www.uic.edu/orgs/womenshealth/index.html](http://www.uic.edu/orgs/womenshealth/index.html)
- Indiana University School of Medicine, Indianapolis, IN, Phone:  
317-274-2754, Internet: [www.iupui.edu/~womenhlt/](http://www.iupui.edu/~womenhlt/)
- Magee Womens Hospital, Pittsburgh, PA, Phone:  
412-641-6003, Internet: [www.magee.edu/cewh2.htm](http://www.magee.edu/cewh2.htm)
- MCP Hahnemann University, Philadelphia, PA,  
Phone: 215-842-7041, Internet:  
<http://www/mcphu.edu/institutes/iwh>
- University of Michigan Health System, Ann Arbor, MI, Phone:  
734-763-0984, Internet: [www.med.umich.edu/whrc  
ctr.excel.html](http://www.med.umich.edu/whrcctr.excel.html)
- Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, Phone:  
614-293-6937, Internet:  
[www.osumedcenter.edu/women/](http://www.osumedcenter.edu/women/)
- University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, Phone: 215-898-0147,  
Internet: [www.obgyn.upenn.edu/cewh/](http://www.obgyn.upenn.edu/cewh/)

University of Puerto Rico, San Juan, PR, Phone: 787-753-0090,  
Internet: [www.rcm.upr.edu/2klwhc](http://www.rcm.upr.edu/2klwhc)

Tulane Xavier Universities of Louisiana, New Orleans, LA,  
Phone: 504-585-6156, Internet: [www.tulane.edu/~tuxcoe/](http://www.tulane.edu/~tuxcoe/)

Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center, Winston-Salem,  
NC, Phone:  
336-713-4220, Internet: [www.wfubmc.edu/women/](http://www.wfubmc.edu/women/)

University of Washington, Seattle, WA,  
Phone: 206-598-8986, Internet:  
[www.depts.washington.edu/~uw98coe/](http://www.depts.washington.edu/~uw98coe/)

University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI, Phone:  
608-267-5566, Internet: [www.womenshealth.wisc.edu/](http://www.womenshealth.wisc.edu/)

Yale University, New Haven, CT, Phone: 203-737-5820,  
Internet: <http://info.med.yale.edu/womenshealth/>

OFFICE ON WOMEN'S HEALTH,  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

NATIONAL CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE IN WOMEN'S HEALTH

PAMPHLET SERIES STAFF

*Susan Clark*, CoE Project Officer and Director, Division of Program Management

*Elizabeth Carey*, Public Health Analyst

*Yvonne Ferguson*, Research Fellow

*Meena Gupta*, Service Fellow

*Valerie Gwinner*, Senior Program Analyst

*Jillian Hooper*, Intern

*Anna Kindermann*, Public Health Analyst

*Carol Krause*, Director, Division of Communications

*Heather Link*, Service Fellow

*Sandi Lowery*, Program Analyst

*Eileen Newman*, Program Analyst

*Princess Thompson*, Administrative Assistant



*For more information contact:*

**Office on Women's Health  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, SW, Room 712E  
Washington, D.C. 20201  
phone: (202) 690-7650  
fax: (202) 401-4005**

