**Preparing for Residency Applications: LGBT Applicants**

Applying for residency is a long and complex process that is stressful for all students, and there are specific personal questions that each student must consider in completing their application. For students who identify as LGBT, there may be common questions that you have. This resource is intended to address some of these questions based on testimonials and advice from graduating medical students and the administration.

**Should I come out?**

This is the first and most personal question that each student should address. The decision to come out varies immensely depending on the individual, but the consensus among recent graduates is that coming out is in the best interest of the applicant, barring some specific circumstances. For the purposes of this document, ‘coming out’ means making available the information that you identify as LGBT.

Starting a residency program entails beginning a 3- to 7-year contractual obligation for employment that will demand the vast majority of your time. You will constantly be engaging with co-workers and supervisors who will shape your personal growth and career in countless ways; you will likely see them more than your loved ones. By coming out in the application process, you open the door early to conversations about the LGBT climate at that specific institution. This can be important for determining if you think you’ll be a good fit for the program – per one student,

*“I didn't want to give a false impression of myself - the people at a program want to know if you're a good fit for them as well, so if you're less than honest it'll probably make for awkward conversations as your residency starts. I'm not willing to be closeted for the sake of a residency, and quite honestly, I wouldn't want to be at a place where my success was contingent on doing so.”*

Many programs have a mission to increase their diversity, and the majority specifically reference “sexual orientation and identity” in their missions. By making the program aware of the added aspect of diversity that you represent, they can include it in their holistic evaluation of each applicant.

However, there are many reasons to opt not to come out. There are certain regions of the country, as well as certain specialties, that are known to be more conservative than others. This leads to widespread fear of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, despite official policies stating non-discrimination. Based on the experiences of students entering a wide variety of specialties, including those with the smallest number of residents and the most competitive fields, we find that these fears are generally overstated. The climate toward LGBT-identified individuals both nationally and at institutions of higher education is friendlier now than ever before.

If fears of being discriminated against in the application phase do predominate in your mind, two questions to consider are: 1) Will you be able and willing to remain closeted throughout the entirety of residency? 2) Does the benefit of attending that program outweigh the potential negative of future workplace discrimination? Per one student –

*“I realized I really wanted to know whether or not that program director or chair would have my back. I don't expect to end up in a dream world where patients, nurses, attendings, and staff never say anything homophobic - and I don't want my coworkers to ever feel that they have to be entirely politically correct around me. But I did need to know that if my being gay ever created any conflict or got in the way of me doing my job, someone in power was going to stand up and help me deal with it.”*

Additional information regarding the attitudes toward LGBT-identified individuals may be gathered by contacting the program, inquiring with a LGBT-student or –resident group at that institution, or by asking previous or current graduates who have experiences to share.

**How could I come out?**

Opinions about how to come out in the application are as varied as the ways to do so. Some students find a way to include the information in either ERAS or their personal statement. By including work you may have done with the LGBT community in ERAS, the interview may then inquire about that activity, which is then an opportunity for you to come out or to start asking questions about the LGBT community at that program.

The personal statement is a chance for you to demonstrate some of your personality and values, as well as to explain why you’re interested in the field. If your LGBT-identity is an integral component of your previous work or desire to enter this specialty, then it may be pertinent to include in the personal statement. Otherwise, there are other opportunities to disclose.

The topic could easily come up during the interview experience. At the interview dinners, you will have a chance to mingle with residents and talk about aspects of each other’s personal lives. This is an excellent chance to find out more about the climate of that institution. Additionally, during the interview day there will be similar conversations with faculty members at which you could casually disclose.

**What should I consider when assessing programs in relation to my LGBT-identity?**

Depending on your life circumstances, information on same-sex partner benefits may be vital to ask about. If being a member of a vocal LGBT community is important to you, be certain to find out if there exist organizations at the institution you could participate in. One consideration may be the degree to which the institution supports the LGBT community: does it actively recruit and support LGBT-identified individuals? Or are they quietly accepting while not promoting their own diversity?

**What do I need to be prepared for if I don’t come out?**

Residency programs are reviewing thousands of applications to select hundreds of applicants to interview for often less than ten spots. They use very little information to select employees that they take responsibility for several years. As part of this process, it is in their best interests to get to know you.

Be prepared to answer questions about your personal life, including if you’re in a relationship. Or, be prepared to dodge those questions frequently. These personal factors are a significant part of who you are, and programs are genuinely interested in that. They may also have a large impact on your decision to move across country for a program.

Yes, there are laws that dictate what a program can and can’t ask you. But in the course of casual conversations that happen during interview days, especially the small talk to pass the time in awkward elevator rides, these questions may still come up.

**As a resident, what can I do so future students don’t have to ask these questions?**

Encourage programs to specifically reference their support for LGBT-identified individuals and to demonstrate their commitment to diversity in their recruitment materials or interview day. Provide information to applicants on resources available to LGBT-identified individuals, such as a social organization that may be established at that institution or the availability and nature of same-sex partner benefits.

Recommended Resources:

* UCSF Guide for LGBT Medical Students: <http://umsomlgbtiq.weebly.com/uploads/8/4/0/4/8404347/residency_guide_lgbt.pdf>