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Commentary on: Promoting a gender-affirming environment in research: Implications for research nurses

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This is an interesting discussion paper on the importance of creating gender-affirming environments in research. The paper suggests that clinical research nurses (CRNs) can play an important role in creating research environments that are inclusive of trans participants. As stated in the paper, research teams often collaborate with CRNs who are in the best position to recruit research participants, screen for eligibility, provide treatments per protocol and conduct safety monitoring. The paper provides a good starting point for organisations and research teams that want to include trans people in research.

The recommendations in the paper are brief and by no means exhaustive, but they resonate with recent recommendations for creating substance use inclusive services, produced by the Glasgow LGBTQI Partnership (2021).

The first recommendation focuses on increasing knowledge and understanding of trans people, use of inclusive language and inclusion of trans people in research. These resonate with the UK LGBT Action Plan (2018) that set out to develop and share best practice education and training to improve healthcare professionals' understanding of LGBT communities. The paper also provides a table with a few trans-related terms and definitions. A more exhaustive list of terms can be found on the Scottish Trans Alliance website, which also has useful tips on inclusive language and use of pronouns. The argument for the importance of the above points is well-made although there is not much discussion on how these can be achieved. Nonetheless, these points can be used as starting points for organisations to review whether their documents and practice are trans-inclusive.

The second recommendation for creating gender-affirming environments focuses on the collection of sex and gender information, utilisation of trauma-informed care and creation of safe environments. There is an excellent argument that if carried out correctly, monitoring trans equality can help understand the needs of trans people better. The authors recommend the use of a two-step approach, proposed by Bauer et al. (2017). I think it is important to acknowledge that this is just one way to structure monitoring questions. However, it can prompt research teams and organisations to have discussions around best practice in relation to collecting data on gender and sexual orientation. For example, the Scottish Trans Alliance and Stonewall Scotland report (2017) provides clear guidance on how to ask monitoring questions.

The final recommendation focuses on the importance of CRNs to engage in reflection and additional education and training. The NMC code (2018) stresses the importance of professional reflection but training needs are harder to address. This argument refers back to the need for education and training to improve healthcare professionals' understanding of LGBT communities and the UK LGBT Action Plan (2018). I think the paper would benefit from more in-depth discussion on how services can evaluate the inclusivity of their practice and work with LGBTQ+ organisations to provide education and training.

Overall, this discussion paper makes a very good argument about the importance of involving trans people in research. It is beyond the scope of the paper to provide a more in-depth discussion of how recommendations can be implemented but I hope it will serve as a platform for organisations to reflect on the inclusivity of their practice.

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Biography: Dr Elena Dimova is a Research Fellow at Glasgow Caledonian University. Her research focuses on reducing alcohol-related harm in different groups. Some of her current and recent projects include a systematic review of alcohol interventions among LGBTQ+ adults and a qualitative study (funded by SHAAP) on improving alcohol services for LGBTQ+ people.