

From Clinic to Program: PRIDE and the evolution of LGBTQ+ Healthcare at Einstein Medical Center Philadelphia

In 2015, Dr. Michele Style, resident physician and co-founder of Einstein Health Network's Pride Clinic, treated a patient who presented with advanced-stage cervical cancer. Although the patient had health insurance and lived within walking distance of the hospital, she had avoided preventive care, including routine Pap smears. During the course of her treatment the woman disclosed that she identifies as a lesbian and feared she would be judged and unwelcome at the hospital due to her sexual orientation. As such, she had avoided pursuing life-saving screenings that could have prevented the progress of her cancer. Unfortunately, her story reflects a much larger trend in healthcare access and outcomes.

According to national research, individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer are more likely to experience discrimination in healthcare settings. In a 2010 survey conducted by [Lambda Legal](#), 70 percent of transgender respondents, and almost 56 percent of lesbian, gay, and bisexual research participants, reported experiencing at least one instance of discrimination while trying to access health services.¹ In a similar analysis conducted by the [National Center for Transgender Equality](#), in partnership with the [National Gay and Lesbian Task Force](#), 19 percent of the trans-identified respondents described having been outright denied health care due to their gender identity. The same survey found that 28 percent of respondents reported being harassed, while an additional two percent experienced physical violence, all in the course of seeking medical care.²

Avoiding healthcare settings due to concerns regarding safety, comfort, and acceptance has left a large swath of

our population without adequate care. Indeed, in the City of Philadelphia alone it is estimated that roughly 3.9% of the population,³ a little over 60,000 people, identify as LGBTQ+. Yet despite the demand, LGBTQ+ competent services are limited. Aside from the [Mazzoni Center](#) in center city Philadelphia, which provides medical services specifically targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender-identified patients, LGBTQ+ competent care is sparse. At the time that Dr. Style first met with the aforementioned patient, there were no medical establishments in North Philadelphia or Montgomery County dedicated to the unique needs of our local LGBTQ+ communities. In 2015 the Einstein Healthcare Network sought to address this gap in coverage and set about establishing an OB/GYN clinic solely dedicated to caring for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer-identified patients.

Since its inception, the [Pride Clinic](#) has specialized in obstetrics, gynecology, and preventive care, for the LGBTQ+ community. In alignment with Einstein Healthcare Network's mission, the Pride Clinic provides LGBTQ+ identified patients with access to a safe, respectful, and confidential environment that ensures clinical excellence and compassionate care. For two hours, once a month, a small team of competent, dedicated providers offers OB/GYN and wellness care to the LGBTQ+ community of North Philadelphia. To date, the Clinic has seen over 50 patients, many of whom reported they had previously not received OB/GYN care, or any healthcare services, in more than a decade, if ever. Surveys completed by all who have visited clearly show they would highly recommend the service to peers.

Thanks to the generous support of the [Albert Einstein Society](#), what started in 2015 as a once-a-month OB/GYN clinic has expanded into the central hub for LGBTQ+ care throughout the Einstein Healthcare Network. In addition to Pride's monthly OB/GYN clinic, the Pride Program is now able to offer LGBTQ+ specific mental health and wellness care as well as endocrinology and surgical services for our trans-identified patients. As part of ensuring LGBTQ+ identified patients are receiving quality services throughout the Health Network, the Pride Program offers comprehensive training and education to all interested employees, including department-specific training tailored to provider's needs. As part of this work, the Pride Program has been instrumental in advancing policies that support our LGBTQ+ identified patients and staff, including advocating for essential changes to our electronic medical records system and employment application paperwork.

When the then-Jewish Hospital (now Einstein Healthcare Network) was established in 1866, it offered compassionate care of the highest quality to those with the greatest needs and least access. The establishment of the Pride Clinic is yet another example of this commitment. As the Pride Program continues to grow, it helps realize Einstein Health Network's mission: "with humanity, humility and honor, to heal by providing exceptionally intelligent and responsive healthcare and education for as many as we can reach."

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