

TIPS FOR PROVIDING PAPS TO TRANS MEN

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1. Split the exam into two parts, with the interview portion of the exam first or even in a separate session than the actual pap test. Try to make the person as comfortable as possible when asking questions that may be difficult to answer. There is no reason to keep them in a tiny gown for this – in fact some people may prefer a sheet to the traditional gown. Additionally, trans people may feel excessively uncomfortable/vulnerable answering questions without clothing on. It may be helpful to do the pelvic exam and the rest of the physical exam in two separate appointments.

2. Do not assume anything about a person's sexual orientation or the type of sex that they are having. Some trans men believe that testosterone is a sufficient form of birth control -it isn't and it is important to have frank and open discussions about sex. Questions to engage this type of conversation may include: Do you have a sexual partner? What are the genders of your partners? Are they also trans? Is there a possibility that any of your partners could get you pregnant?

3. Ask whether or not they have/have had penetrative sex. This may help you gauge a person's comfort during the exam. It may be helpful to know this in advance and ask them to try penetration at home first- using a small toy, fingers or even a speculum. Some may be willing to try this, while others will not.

4. Ask your clients if they want to play with the speculum, see pictures of a pap test, etc. Pap tests and speculums can be scary. It is important to be attentive to the ways that the speculum may add an extra layer of discomfort for trans men. Some – not all – trans men may feel uncomfortable with the idea of penetration, and may feel their gender is undermined by this function of the speculum. It may be helpful to explain why you need to use a speculum.

5. Let your clients know they can bring a friend or advocate to do things during the exam such as holding their hand or helping them with distraction techniques.

6. Using the right words: During the interview portion, ask your clients what words they use for their body parts. Although non-medical terms such as “front hole” may seem unprofessional to use, these are words that some trans men use to describe their body parts and should be respected during the exam. The terms vagina and labia may be very disconcerting for some, while others will say “it is what it is” and want you to use those commonly understood terms regardless of their comfort with them. Using vague terms such as ‘external genitals’ or ‘internal part of the exam’, instead of labia and cervix, may also be preferred. Even using the word “normal” can make people feel uncomfortable. Words like “healthy”, “normal for you”, and “insert/withdraw” during the exam can be useful. **DO NOT say things like: “Everything looks perfect!” or “Now I’m going to penetrate you.”** This goes for everyone but especially for trans men.



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7. Many guys who are taking testosterone will have fewer secretions and things can be much dryer. Using lube and warm water can be very helpful for speculum insertion. Write that lube was used on the requisition if you do use lube. Testosterone also makes trans male genitals look different. It can cause the clitoris to grow and the cervix may look atrophic. Although you may be curious, this is not the time to start a discussion about those changes (except for things directly relevant to the pap).

8. If a person does refuse an internal pelvic exam you can try and do as much of the exam as possible. This includes an external genital exam looking for any swelling, discharge, lumps/bumps. A client may feel comfortable with a bimanual exam but not a speculum exam. This may not find cervical cancer, but it is still a step towards the client's health and they may feel more comfortable coming back for the internal portion if they have a positive experience. Building up a trusting relationship is important. Also let people know that there are other things that they can do to increase cervical health such as quit smoking, reducing stress, and maintaining a healthy diet. It is important that a person not feel forced but rather that they understand the importance of a pap exam and choose it for their own health. They must be told of the unknown risks of testosterone on the cervix and the risks associated with not having the exam.

9. Do not make a trans person feel like they need to provide an education session. This can destroy their trust in the relationship and compromise their health seeking behaviors in the future. This may mean no students or unnecessary questions about what it's like being trans, the effects of hormones, surgeries, etc.

10. Technical difficulties – sensitivity is required on the part of the person taking the sample and the people processing it. Sometimes laboratories are confused by samples from a cervix/vagina tied to a person with M on their OHIP (Ontario Health Insurance) card. This can lead to thrown away samples and numerous unnecessary phone calls. Writing that this is a trans man's sample on the requisition or even writing a letter along with the sample can save a lot of time and avoid hassles.

11. Some structural things about a clinic – such as an LGBT specific area, LGBT hours, a trans specific clinic, and making sure that providers during the men's clinic also are capable of doing a pelvic exam (though some trans men will still prefer to access a women's clinic for this) can be helpful. By increasing LGBT and trans men's representation in the resources available in your waiting room you can do much to make the environment more comfortable for trans men.

12. Ask – What do you think may make this a better experience for you?

13. Just because you are a queer/trans or feminist clinic/practitioner does not mean that the client will like you or have a positive experience. For some trans men the nature of the exam itself simply makes for an unpleasant experience. Mostly, it is important that you listen to the client, develop a plan together to help meet their health goals, and listen to their feedback.

For more information about paps for trans men and materials aimed at trans men, please visit:

checkitoutguys.ca