

“Any Questions?” Podcast Transcript
Episode 16: Gender Affirming Health Services

[Jazzy Instrumental Intro Music]

Madeleine: Welcome to the Fall 2022 season of Any Questions. Once again you'll be joined by peer influencers Demi and Jerry along with some special guests to discuss wellness topics that impact college student life. In this episode Demi and Jerry are joined by Luca Rodriguez from the Sexual Health unit to discuss gender affirming health services at the University Health Center. Happy listening!

Demi: Welcome to Any Questions, a University of Maryland podcast by students for students. I'm Demi, my pronouns are she/they and I'm an HPWS peer influencer.

Jerry: And I'm Jerry, my pronouns are he/him and I'm also an HPWS peer influencer. And today we'll be talking about gender affirming care at the University of Maryland.

Demi: Today's episode is targeted towards those of you who want to learn more about gender affirming care through UMD's Health Center. We'll be doing a deep dive into HRT including what it is and how to access it. We'll also touch on some other resources too.

Jerry: Yeah and even if this doesn't apply to you directly keep listening. You can share this information with a friend or even learn something new and if you find yourself out of the loop while listening to this episode the description will include a few links that might be helpful.

Demi: And just as a few quick disclaimers. We'll be mentioning some heavy topics in this podcast including trans suicidality. We also made the conscious decision to name people in this episode who you may come into contact with to provide some names for you to recognize for when you might meet with these people but keep in mind that you may be meeting with other providers especially as time goes on.

Jerry: Today's episode we're joined by Luca. Glad to have you here today Luca.

Luca: Thanks Jerry um it's nice to be here. Thanks for having me on. My name is Luca and I use he/they pronouns. I graduated from UMD in 2022 with a degree in anthropology but right now I'm working with the Health Center's Gender Affirming Care team to update their trans health resource guide.

So in doing research for that project I found out that many trans students weren't aware either of the guide or of the fact that the Health Center offers gender affirming care. So this podcast is a way for us to start reaching more people with this information and I also just wanted to mention that while I haven't received any hormone related healthcare at the Health Center, I've talked to several people who have and I did again an internship with staff on the Gender Affirming Care team so I've spent a lot of time learning about their services and this process.

Demi: So here at the University of Maryland our mission is providing quality care to promote health and support academic success to the entire student campus community. One of the core values at the Health Center that supports this mission is providing excellent nonjudgmental customer service.

Jerry: Yeah and so it's important that students of all genders feel comfortable accessing healthcare resources at the Health Center and we hope by highlighting some of these gender affirming resources on campus that maybe we can educate the listeners on these resources but also help them feel confident in accessing them as well.

Luca: Yeah and according to the National College Health Assessment, 3 to 4% of the college student population in the US identifies as trans or gender non-conforming. This may not sound like a lot but this corresponds to more than one in every 33 students at UMD so that's over 1200 people that you're currently sharing the campus with.

Demi: Wow, so following that statistic there are probably several people in your classrooms alone who could benefit from this knowledge of gender affirming care on campus. And we know that if you did not know about these resources you are not alone and we will continue to draw attention to these important services.

[Jazzy Instrumental Transition Music]

Jerry: There are a few things that we think are important to acknowledge before we do a deeper dive into the awesome health care services provided at the University of Maryland Health Center. So first we want to acknowledge that we are aware that many trans people may feel uncomfortable and anxious in medical settings and with medical providers. This can be due to anticipated or past negative experiences which unfortunately are relatively common for trans people we also want to acknowledge that there are many trans and gender non-conforming folks that desperately want or need equitable and inclusive healthcare and are unable to access it for a variety of systemic and institutionalized reasons.

Luca: The University Health Center recognizes that building trust through demonstrated inclusivity and ongoing training is a critical part of providing high quality and trans inclusive healthcare. One of the ways that they do this is through the annual recertification with the Human Rights Campaign's Healthcare Equality Index. This process allows the Human Rights Campaign to annually review the health centers forms and policies specifically in terms of their LGBTQ+ inclusivity. So they look for LGBTQ+ inclusive services, resources, insurance coverage, and so much more. Last but not least, this equality index process requires staff to go through annual LGBTQ+ health training.

Demi: In 2015, the University of Maryland Health Center was proudly the second college Health Center in the country to participate in this process and receive a leader in LGBT healthcare recognition. They've participated every year since 2015 and maintain perfect scores each year. That's commitment.

Jerry: Our gender affirming care program has existed since 2009, spearheaded by the efforts of Penny Jacobs, one of the certified registered nurse practitioners on the team. She has more than 13 years of experience working with the UMD trans community and providing them with affirming comprehensive health care. Let's take a moment to talk about one of the services that trans students at UMD can access: Hormone Replacement Therapy.

Luca: Hormone Replacement Therapy or HRT, involves providing the body with the hormones that will cause what is essentially the puberty of "the opposite sex"

to that assigned at birth. So for example, transmasculine people take testosterone to masculinize the body causing effects such as facial and body hair growth, a deeper voice, and stronger more angular features that are characteristic of those who were assigned male.

Demi: Transfeminine people often take an antiandrogen to reduce the effects of continued testosterone production by the body along with estrogen to stimulate breast growth, soften skin and body hair, down out facial features and otherwise create a more feminine look. People on hormones may also experience body fat redistribution, changes in sexual experiences, and changes in mood and emotional disposition.

Jerry: Not all trans folks choose to take hormones or otherwise medically transition but for many trans people, HRT is a medical necessary health care link to several measures of enhanced Health and Wellness including reduced suicidality and increased school retention. This is especially important considering that trans students are twice as likely to report having attempted suicide in the past year compared to cisgender students. Trans and gender non-conforming students are also twice as likely to report that they feel like they don't belong on campus than their cis counterparts and finally 29% of trans students feel that their campus climate doesn't really support the discussion of student health compared to the national percentage of 12%.

Luca: Yeah, those struggles are part of why HRT is endorsed or supported by almost every professional Medical Association. Wellness is important including trans wellness and we recognize that trans wellness does not exist isolated from other identities including race, disability, immigration status, and sexuality, just to name a few. Being trans can be difficult and being a trans college student can add compound stressors. Therefore, providing and highlighting these gender affirming resources are meant to help alleviate some stressors that come with some of the Health and Wellness concerns that come with these identities.

Demi: Yeah, which speaks to the legitimacy and profound benefits that HRT can provide especially when compounded with other affirming people, spaces, and practices.

Jerry: So with all of that being said, how do you start HRT at UMD?

Luca: That's a great question. So, HRT is available to registered graduate and undergrad students through the University Health Center and can be accessed through 3 easy steps, guided by the informed consent model.

[Jazzy Instrumental Transition Music]

Demi: The first step involves a visit with mental health services. You can make an appointment with them by calling 301-314-8106 and telling them you're looking to start HRT at the Health Center and need a hormone intake. The intention of this intake session is not to gatekeep or determine whether you are trans enough to receive hormones. It is instead intended to help understand where you are in your personal gender journey, discuss a gender dysphoria or gender nonconforming diagnosis which is required by some insurance companies, assess how ready you feel to start hormones so the team can best support you on your desired timeline, and discuss any mental health concerns you have or are managing so the team can provide or refer you to the most appropriate complementary support.

Jerry: In general, the more supported and cared for people are, the more comfortable they feel about their transition and their medication. The team at UHC really strives to provide high quality and comprehensive medical care that considers the needs of the whole person rather than giving you a prescription and sending you on your way.

Luca: Yeah and if you're already working with a provider in the community to access hormones whether that be a mental health or medical provider, the process for you might be different or shorter so make sure you contact Penny Jacobs or one of the other gender affirming care team members directly through the myUHC portal to see which steps may or may not apply to you.

Demi: So the second step of this three-step process is the informed consent and navigating services and care appointment. The UHC recognizes that decisions about starting hormones are first and foremost the patient's decision and best practices encourage providers to assist and support patients in making informed healthcare decisions so that they are prepared and have the most opportunities for success.

Jerry: Everyone is unique. Their journeys, level of knowledge, transition needs and goals, insurance situations, family and social supports are all unique. So, in addition to going over the informed consent documents, this step in the process is really all about seeing how UHC or UMD at large can be of the most support to you during this exciting time. For example, some students are interested in nutrition coaching, voice lessons, social student groups, housing resources, the food pantry, or just a better understanding of their insurance coverage.

Luca: The informed consent documents that you'll review in this session discuss the four main areas where people can expect changes which are physical, emotional, sexual, and reproductive and what is expected to be permanent and not permanent, the possible risks, and how the gender affirming care team mitigates risk and finally, a general agreement to open communication so that the team can best care for you while you are their patient.

Demi: The step to meeting is free, super informal, and really just some protected time to meet with Jenna Messman or another health care provider and ensure that you understand the process. You'll have space to ask any questions about HRT, explore what kinds of support might best align with your personal goals and needs, and make sure you understand how to connect to the next and final step: seeing the medical provider.

Jerry: And so the last step involves medical appointments with Penny Jacobs or one of the other medical providers on the gender affirming care team. At the first visit, a physical exam will be performed and blood work will be ordered. There is a lab at UHC so you might be able to get your blood work done right away. They'll also collect your personal and family medical history. These items will help assess your baseline health and allow your providers to help you meet your transition goals and needs safely and successfully.

Luca: At the next appointment, you'll review your lab results with the medical provider and discuss what they mean and how they could change in relation to HRT and in general. If you have a concerning medical condition that may be impacted by hormones you may be referred to a specialist. As long as you are medically cleared and you're comfortable, you will start hormones at the second

medical visit. You'll also receive education on how to administer the medication yourself especially if you're going to be doing injections.

Demi: And once you start taking your medication, you'll need to routinely come back for follow up appointments which are generally more frequent in the beginning and space out more overtime. Visits for lab work may be more frequent depending on patient response to medication, medication adjustments, and any complications that arise. It's important to monitor your progress, check in about your happiness and satisfaction, and screen for any unwanted changes or dangerous side effects. Referrals to surgeons and specialists can be made if you're looking for those services too.

Jerry: Yeah and even though UHC is really excited to highlight this service, outside of HRT there are tons of resources for trans, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming folks on campus.

Luca: Yeah! Did you know that UMD offers gender inclusive and gender neutral housing for students living in residence halls? Or that UMD's Hearing and Speech Clinic offers voice feminization and masculinization lessons?

Demi: There are also tons of opportunities to get involved with the LGBTQ+ community on campus, including the LGBTQ+ equity center and MICA. These organizations can help with exploring your identity, fostering community based support, and provide leadership opportunities.

[Jazzy Instrumental Transition Music]

Jerry: So, we've covered tons of information in this podcast but before we go let's do a quick recap.

Luca: While not all trans or gender nonconforming people want or need HRT, hormone replacement therapy is often a medically necessary, beneficial, and often lifesaving care for many trans people. Starting HRT care on campus takes three steps. One, an appointment with mental health services. Two, an appointment detailing support resources. And Three, a medical appointment.

Demi: For more detailed information on starting HRT at UMD and for other resources for trans, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming folks, check out the trans health resources guide. You can find it on the UHC website or in the description of this episode.

Luca: Even if you aren't seeking HRT through the Health Center, we still have your back! Seeking health care as a trans person can be nerve wracking and it can be hard to know where to start. The UHC has lots of trans health resources and connections that we can use to help with this. So, for that reason, the gender affirming care team can refer you to specific UHC providers, assist you in finding a trans friendly off-campus primary care provider, or help you navigate health insurance coverage for a transition related or gendered procedure.

Jerry: Lastly, if you're looking for support and additional resources you should definitely check out MICA and the LGBTQ+ Equity Center. You can follow MICA on Instagram @umdmica or send them an e-mail at mica-contact@umd.edu. You can also e-mail the LGBTQ+ equity center at lgbtq@umd.edu or follow them at Instagram @lgbtqequity. Lastly, if you're looking for support and additional resources you should definitely check out MICA and the LGBTQ+ Equity Center. You can follow MICA, M I C A at Instagram @umdmica or send them an e-mail at mica-contact@umd.edu. You can also e-mail the LGBTQ+ Equity Center at lgbtq@umd.edu or follow them on Instagram @lgbtqequity.

Demi: Thank you so much for listening and we'll see you next time.

Madeleine: Thanks for tuning into this episode of Any Questions. Be sure to join us for our next episode where Demi and Jerry will explore our pet assisted programs at the University Health Center. Until then, be well.

[Jazzy Instrumental Outro Music]

[BLOOPERS]

May not be accurate

Jerry: Glenn nation, point time.

Demi: Please, it's not-.

Much Laughing Ensues

Jerry: I'm so sorry.

Luca: Wait, oh my god.

[Podcast Ends]