

Recognizing Mental Health Awareness Month: SIMmersion Provides Training for Gender Affirming Therapy

The NIH funded SIMmersion to development three virtual role-players to help mental healthcare providers practice & build gender affirming therapy.

COLUMBIA, MD, UNITED STATES, May 23, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Why Gender Affirmative Therapy?

Mental Health Awareness month provides an important reminder of the need to increase mental healthcare access to the LGBTQ+ community and specifically the transgender and nonbinary ones. This is because people whose gender identity differ from their sex assigned at birth are four times more likely to experience mental health concerns (e.g., anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts) than cisgender (gender identity corresponds with the sex registered for them at birth) peers because of how society treats their community. (For sources see <https://www.nami.org/Your-Journey/Identity-and-Cultural-Dimensions/LGBTQ/>)



Figure 1 Role-Player Jemma Walker

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Learning about the need for gender affirmative therapy can be eye opening.”

Dale Olsen, Ph.D.

Psychiatry.org and the American Psychological Association (<https://www.apa.org>) encourage mental healthcare providers to educate themselves on the unique and diverse needs of transgender and nonbinary individuals. Unfortunately, less than 30% of providers report having the knowledge and skills required to provide gender affirming therapy to members of the community. (For

source see : <https://www.apa.org/practice/guidelines/transgender.pdf>). With funding from the

National Institutes on Minority Health and Health Disparities, SIMmersion partnered with Towson University to develop three online role-play-based training systems that allow clinicians to practice therapy sessions with fictional transgender and nonbinary individuals.

To ensure the training suite accurately represented the needs of the community, the team invited licensed therapists, educators, community leaders, and transgender and nonbinary individuals to review and provide feedback on the e-Learning materials, the conversation scripts, and the scoring systems. These trainings are now being used by graduate students and licensed therapists.

Brief summaries about these practice systems are provided below. You can learn more about the [Patient Intake](#) scenario in our YouTube video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=azEMSRAKvyl> or read about the [Traditional Needs](#) and [Transitioning](#) scenarios on the SIMmersion website.

Practice Creating a Safe and Inclusive Environment During a Patient Intake.

Jemma Walker is a fictional client who is new to the therapy practice. During this role-play, providers learn to balance the discussion regarding gender, avoid making assumptions while understanding the presenting issue, and demonstrating cultural knowledge. Providers are encouraged to practice talking with Jemma many times, because in each conversation, Jemma's needs, experiences, and gender identity will change.

Practice Supporting the Social Needs of Transgender and Nonbinary Individuals.



Figure 2 Role-Player James Moore



Figure 3 Role-Player Lucas Novak

James Moore is playing a role as a person seeking help learning how the world understands their (preferred pronoun) genderqueer identity. During practice sessions, providers learn to explore and validate the interconnected nature of their gender identities and systemic stress while acknowledging harm and empowering self-advocacy. Providers are encouraged to practice talking with James many times, because in each conversation James is struggling with a relationship that invalidates a different aspect of their identity.

Practice Working with Clients Who Are Transitioning.

Role-player Lucas Novak is a client seeking support in his transition. During each session with Lucas, providers learn to respect boundaries, avoid assumptions, and validate identities when exploring transition goals and gender euphoria (a state of intense excitement and happiness) and dysphoria (a state characterized by generalized discontent and agitation). Providers are encouraged to practice talking with Lucas many times, because in each conversation, his transition goals are different.

Final Remarks

According to the Better Health Channel (<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au>) "Social stigma and discrimination can make mental health problems worse and stop a person from getting the help they need." Transgender and nonbinary individuals deserve access to gender affirming mental healthcare that will help improve their lives. Go to <https://www.simmersion.com> to learn more.

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