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NEW LEAF OUTREACH TO ELDERS

Serving the lesbian, gay, bisexual & transgender community

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LGBT SENIORS FACE HEALTHCARE ABUSE

by GayHealth Staff McGill School of Social Work

To be gay and a senior citizen can make life in a youth-obsessed culture difficult enough, but a new study says some gay seniors also face huge obstacles in accessing proper health care.

The McGill school of Social Work conducted the study on the treatment of gay and lesbian seniors by health care providers in three urban centers in Canadian cities—Vancouver, Montreal and Halifax. The results were stunning.

Many gay and lesbian seniors told the researchers that they had never even told their doctors that they were gay. Refusing to come out to your doctor isn't merely an issue for seniors, who grew up in a far less open society than those in today's LGBT community. A recent GayHealth.com survey says that more than 40 percent 'rarely' or 'never' even discuss their sexuality with their doctors. Another GayHealth.com survey reports that one-third had not 'come out' to their healthcare provider at all.

The McGill researchers found that the gay and lesbian elders would only 'come out' to their physicians if asked directly. But here's the real shocker: Others reported mistreatment if their caregivers or health care providers even suspected their sexual orientation.

One Vancouver senior who was quoted in the study said that she was ignored when she asked for help after one nurse had identified her as a lesbian from a newspaper article.

"From then on, I couldn't get anyone to help me out of bed," the woman told researchers.

In another shocking example, a gay senior citizen told researchers that he had a home care worker who, when he found out the man was gay, offered to help "save me from this...blasphemous thing."

In interviews, the researchers said and lesbian seniors to interview knit group of people.

Psychologist Greg Cason says that ment because they're less likely to themselves, due to long standing

"When you mix people who have abilities, you often get abuse," he tors and other caregivers rarely their personal bigotry. Rather the the hands of the vulnerable patient.



they actually had trouble finding gay because they are such a private, close-

seniors are especially prone to mistreat- feel empowered enough to speak up for generational and societal fears.

prejudice with people who have vulner- says. "Prejudice is everywhere, but doc- wear buttons on their lapels that list out responsibility is incorrectly placed into the hands of the vulnerable patient. The healthcare organization itself needs to step up to the plate."

Adds Cason "It is up to the healthy to provide and care for the ailing in our society. When that care is compro- mised or becomes abuse, we must band together to root it out."

Source: www.gayhealth.com

While this study was done in Canada, seniors in this country report the same concerns and go into the closet when faced with hospital stays, in home services, assisted living or on entering nursing homes.