



CONTACT: [Jessica Michan](mailto:jmichan@legacycommunityhealth.org), Public Relations Director
jmichan@legacycommunityhealth.org or 713-364-3221

[Barrett White](mailto:cwhite@legacycommunityhealth.org), External Communications Specialist
cwhite@legacycommunityhealth.org or 713-416-7309

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Legacy Health Celebrates Lesbian Visibility Week

Texas' largest community health clinic has experts on staff to discuss observance

HOUSTON (April 26, 2021) – In observance of Lesbian Visibility Week, observed every April 26 to May 2 since 2008, Legacy Community Health recognizes our patients, employees, and volunteers who identify as lesbian and their contributions to society and culture, and highlight health issues in the community that we aim to address.

[Dr. Vandana Shrikanth](#), a primary care physician at Legacy Community Health's flagship clinic in Houston's Montrose district, says that the most common issue among lesbian patients is adherence to appointments, or even scheduling them in the first place.

"If you don't feel safe or empowered in a certain space, you're less likely to make that appointment," Dr. Shrikanth says, adding that many lesbian patients she has treated have expressed distrust with medicine if clinic staff aren't inclusive. This is true across the LGBTQ+ community, but especially prevalent among gender diverse individuals and lesbians, Dr. Shrikanth has observed.

While there is much literature online about the health of heterosexual men and women (and to a lesser extent, gay men), there is not much to be found on the specific health concerns of lesbians. In fact, in a qualitative study called "Healthcare Experiences of Underrepresented Lesbian and Bisexual Women", the authors found that "providers compromise care for [lesbian and bisexual] women when they do not create safe and encouraging environments for their patients to disclose their sexual orientations." This is just one instance that highlights the importance of competent care for LGBTQ+ patients.

The publication continues, "Rates of nondisclosure to healthcare providers are 32.6% for bisexual women and 12.9% for lesbians. Medical settings welcoming disclosure increase the likelihood of [lesbian and bisexual] women to seek and obtain necessary and appropriate healthcare." Legacy Montrose, a clinic that is grounded in the LGBTQ community, and providers like Dr. Shrikanth, are trying to change that narrative of care.

Getting lesbian-identifying individuals into care isn't enough, though. For providers with lesbian patients, it's crucial to understand the needs and risks of the community, and to properly screen for them – as providers do for any other community.

A common misconception among lesbians however, is that HPV screenings are deemed unnecessary due to the lack of male partners. This is dangerous, Dr. Shrikanth says, because

HPV, if left undiagnosed and unaddressed, can lead to cervical cancer in the long term. And while lesbians – generally – are at a lower risk of certain illnesses such as HIV, other concerns that see higher prevalence in the lesbian community include hepatitis C and bacterial vaginosis. “It’s always best practice to remember that regular STI screening is a responsible safe-sex practice, regardless of sexual preference,” Dr. Shrikanth says.

Legacy affirms patients of all identities who pass through our doors, judgement free.

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About Legacy Community Health

Legacy Community Health (Legacy) is a full-service network of community health clinics offering primary and specialty care in the Texas Gulf Coast region. Services include adult primary care, behavioral health services, community outreach, dental care, endocrinology, gender health, geriatrics, comprehensive HIV/AIDS care, nutrition and wellness, OB/GYN and maternity care, pediatrics, pharmacy, public health, school-based health, social services, and vision care. With more than 40 locations across Houston, Baytown, Deer Park, and Beaumont, Legacy is the largest Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) in Texas. Legacy has been a United Way-affiliated agency since 1990. To learn more, visit www.legacycommunityhealth.org.