

## UW Medicine: a focus on healthcare equity for the LGBTQ community

As a young law student at Tulane University, Nicki McCraw felt a passion for the underserved, and LGBTQ issues were top-of-mind.

McCraw formed a nonprofit organization that provided free legal advice to people living with AIDS; created the first law review focused entirely on LGBTQ legal issues—a scholarly journal that’s still published today; and later, as a credentialed attorney, worked on the case that overturned “don’t ask, don’t tell.”

Impressive bona fides, and formative experiences because they set the stage for her current role.

McCraw is assistant vice-president of Human Resources at UW Medicine. With an employee base of 30,000, it’s the state’s largest health system, and one of the nation’s most prestigious.

Its mission is to improve the health of the public. Diversity, equity and inclusion are watchwords for the organization, which believes that everyone has a right to quality healthcare.

McCraw is an 11-year veteran who works to ensure that all patient constituencies are equitably served. The LGBTQ community is one of them.

In 2013, she and Paul Hayes—now the executive director of the health system’s Harborview Medical Center—formed the LGBTQ Clinical Care Committee. The committee works “to address the healthcare issues and concerns of LGBTQ patients and their families,” McCraw said, “and to ensure that the UW Medicine workforce is educated with the appropriate cultural competencies.”

The health system is evaluated annually by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC). Their Healthcare Equality Index is a benchmarking process that rates healthcare facilities nationwide, assessing their level of progressiveness regarding LGBTQ policies and practices.

Under McCraw’s stewardship as committee co-chair, the diagnosis has been excellent; for seven consecutive years HRC has bestowed the designation “Leader in LGBTQ Healthcare Equality” to UW Medicine’s affiliated hospitals—a coveted national award.

“We’re the only hospital system in the state that has received that recognition,” McCraw said, “so that’s a feather in the cap of UW Medicine and something we’re quite proud of.”

### **Blueprint for success**

The organization’s commitment to promoting healthcare equity and reducing disparities is codified in its Healthcare Equity Blueprint which, in part, ensures that LGBTQ concerns are understood throughout the health system.

The committee addresses the blueprint’s goals through external outreach efforts and mandatory employee training—for staff and physicians alike. The training creates understanding by communicating definitions of basic terms like cisgender or transgender.

Other instruction promotes situational awareness, something as simple as knowing how to address transgender individuals when they're called from the waiting room to the patient care area "in a way that's sensitive to them," McCraw noted. "It walks the person being trained through different scenarios to help them think about issues from that patient's perspective."

The training is not merely some pro forma HR mandate. It speaks to a deep commitment to educating medical providers. A further example is the committee's contributions to a learning module that's being developed for UW School of Medicine students and physicians to help them better understand LGBTQ healthcare concerns.

"We want to ensure that UW Medicine physicians are prepared to serve this community going forward."

### **Relentless pursuit of health equity**

Further efforts focus on making sure that Seattle's transgender community is well-served.

"We're providing additional assistance to transgender patients that coordinates both primary and specialty care—such as endocrinology—through their primary care doctor," McCraw said. "We're a huge organization and it's often hard for these patients to navigate the system."

"We always want to serve people better. We have ideas about improving care, but we don't always know what the patients know." To learn, the committee brings in patients and family members in focus group-like settings to figuratively take the temperature of the community, and to determine proactively what issues may need addressing.

"As an organization we work to overcome the healthcare disparities of any patient population, including the LGBTQ community. It's rewarding and important work. And we want people to know that we're here to serve."