At the intersection of addiction, recovery, and sexuality

LGBTQ-integrative addiction treatment

“When this is a place where you can go, that you can feel safe and look inside yourself and discover yourself.”

—Betty Ford, former First Lady

When Betty Ford made this comment about her namesake alcohol treatment center many years ago, she could not have known how her words would resonate in the future.

Recently, the Betty Ford Center in Rancho Mirage, California, launched programming designed specifically for individuals identifying as LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning). According to Counselor James Barry, the LGBTQ-integrative programming is an important addition to the center’s intensive outpatient program.

“Addiction parallels the challenges of sexual orientation and gender identification,” Barry noted. “Because most members of this population are already skilled at hiding their true identities, they are equally adept at hiding their addiction, potentially compounding both issues.”

Barry is a certified drug and alcohol counselor who holds a bachelor’s and master’s degree in psychology. The center initiated an LGBTQ peer group in the mid-1990s, and Barry has facilitated this group for the past five years, working with patients individually as well. He recently developed an curriculum to address the following issues specific to the LGBTQ community:

• Intersection of LGBTQ and other identities/continuity of self
• LGBTQ culture: How and where do I fit?
• Parallels between addiction and concealing sexual orientation/gender identity
• LGBTQ across the lifespan
• LGBTQ specific stressors
• Access to weekly peer support/process group

The programming reflects research conducted by the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation’s Butler Center for Research that suggests LGBTQ individuals benefit from uniquely tailored addiction treatment that is both affirming and integrative. Using an evidence-based LGBTQ-specific curriculum, the new programming addresses trauma, cultural sensitivity, social stressors, stigmatization, discrimination, family system issues, and the coming-out process.

The curriculum also includes:
• Drug screening
• Individual counseling
• Family program support
• Continuing care planning

In addition to the program in southern California, the Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation offers LGBTQ-integrated residential and outpatient treatment at facilities in Oregon.

“Having a space to discuss sexuality and addiction was one of the most positive and helpful experiences of treatment.”

—Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation alumnus

The Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation is a force of healing and hope for individuals, families and communities affected by addiction to alcohol and other drugs. It is the nation’s largest nonprofit treatment provider, with a legacy that began in 1949 and includes the 1982 founding of the Betty Ford Center. With 15 sites in California, Minnesota, Oregon, Illinois, New York, Florida, Massachusetts, Colorado and Texas, the Foundation offers prevention and recovery solutions nationwide and across the entire continuum of care for youth and adults.