



UAB to open Alabama's first mental health clinic for LGBTQ patients

gay_small.PNG

A participant in a Pride parade paints her face in rainbow colors.

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A mental health clinic for patients who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender will open at UAB on Monday, becoming the first of its kind in Alabama.

The clinic will operate out of the Department of Psychiatry space at the Callahan Eye Hospital. Dr. Larry McMillan, who recently joined the faculty at UAB, will treat patients at the clinic.

Members of the LGBTQ community are three times more likely to suffer from major depression and anxiety than their straight counterparts, according to the National Alliance for Mental Illness. Gay, lesbian and transgender youth attempt suicide two of three times more often than others, according to the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Prejudice and family rejection can cause suicidal thoughts and lead to substance abuse.

"Many members of the LGBTQ community are not inclined to seek professional help when they are in need due to fears of being marginalized or stigmatized," McMillan said in a statement. "We want to knock down those barriers to care so that the new clinic is a welcoming environment where those who identify as LGBTQ will feel comfortable enough to seek assistance for their mental health needs."

Even though there is a need for services in the LGBTQ community, there has also been distrust between patients and medical professionals, said Stephanie Perry, administrative manager of psychiatric clinics. Patients may have encountered therapists who tried to change or suppress their sexual orientation through conversion therapy, a practice that has been debunked by all major psychiatric groups.

"We want to create a safe place for people to go," Perry said. "As a profession, we understand that being LGBTQ is not a disorder. Societal stressors can really cause depression and anxiety and make them worse. That's really an important distinction."

In addition to serving LGBTQ patients, the clinic will also provide education to medical practitioners at UAB and across the state. The clinic will provide education to medical students and residents, Perry said. The goal is to increase knowledge and trust between LGBTQ patients and their medical providers.

"This community is not just in New York," Perry said. "It's not just in California. It's here too. We want people to know this is a safe place to come."

