

Pathways to transgender health

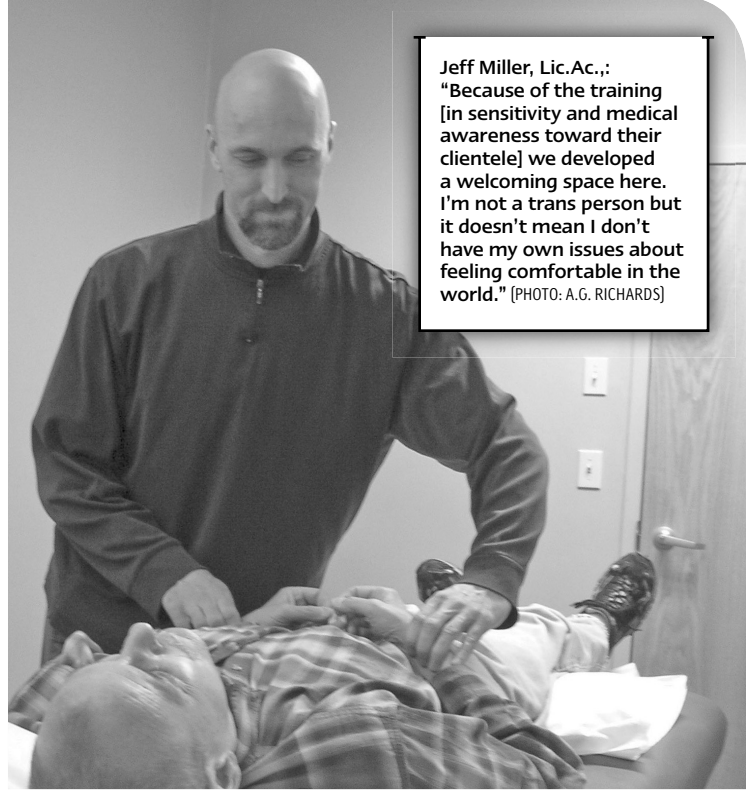
**PATHWAYS TO WELLNESS
MAKES EXTRA EFFORTS TO
ENSURE THAT TRANSGENDER
HOLISTIC HEALTH CARE
IS WELCOMING**

Jason Goldberg remembered the first time he entered Pathways to Wellness in the Back Bay seeking a holistic approach to his health care. Self-identified as transgender, Goldberg recalled being excited but a little nervous. "The physical space of Pathways is very calming and open and relaxed," Goldberg said. "I remember the people at the front desk were full of energy, really good energy. It was very friendly. It is a really helpful thing when the first people you see are very friendly. It's going to make your experience all the better, I think."

Goldberg, who sought help for a difficulty with constant urination, found that after several treatments his physical problem was resolved. He continues to go to Pathways because "the acupuncture really helps. The staff is great. I don't feel any sort of shame. I just feel like they're helping me out and I'm helping them out."

Jeff Miller, Lic.Ac., was one of the acupuncturists who treated Goldberg. Miller explained how Pathways sought to keep offering comprehensive, effective care. "Because of the training [in sensitivity and medical awareness toward their clientele] we developed a welcoming space here. I'm not a trans person but it doesn't mean I don't have my own issues about feeling comfortable in the world. One of the things that I really value about working here is that this place allows me to be who I need to be and it lets everyone that comes through the door be that way. What you need to do and be is what you can do and be here. So that's huge, especially for [the trans] population."

Pathways was originally funded solely to work with individuals who were HIV-positive, but has since made every effort to expand services to more fully serve its clientele, particularly the GLBT community. But they are facing some severe cutbacks. Kristen Porter, Pathways' executive director, received a business degree from Boston University and is also a Licensed Acupuncturist who first came to Pathways as a volunteer business consultant. "When we first started, we had about 700 square feet of space. It was just one room," she said. "We now have 7,000 square feet as well as several off-site programs at hospitals and health centers. That's been tremendous growth. Unfortunately, because of these budget cuts in June, we will be looking at



Jeff Miller, Lic.Ac.:
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downsizing significantly. But it's our hope and commitment that we'll be steadfast with our mission, which is to provide access to people."

Pathways currently serves about 1,300 clients per year, most of who report being from the GLBT community, according to Porter. Miller said that of his patients, only a small percentage is trans. They offer herbal medicine, acupuncture, shiatsu, and craniosacral, among the treatments available.

So what is different about trans healthcare? "I would say that there are a lot of common denominators," Miller said. But even though back pain is back pain whatever causes it, "a trans person is going to come in with possibly different levels of cultural or societal traumas or at least places where they are very guarded, especially around coming in and sitting with a health care practitioner."

It's common for the trans patient to want to tell the practitioner about his or her trans life. Miller felt that they are often so used to being ignored and/or rejected that it is a way to be certain that this practitioner will actually see them for themselves.

"Certainly I remember telling Jeff and I remember Jeff looking at me like, 'Okay, that's great.' It was just not an issue. 'Tell me what else is going on for you,'" Goldberg recalled Miller saying. In fact, Goldberg said of the staff, "Whatever you bring in there, I certainly felt that I've been listened to. Not only heard but actually listened to."

Porter offered her thought on how

symbolically fitting the whole spectrum of Chinese healing arts are to the trans person: "I would say that the one thing that is such an amazing synergy with Chinese medicine for trans patients is that inherent in the philosophy of the medicine itself is sort of this trans concept. The universal philosophy of Chinese medicine is based upon the symbol of the Yin and Yang. Very simplistically, people view that symbol as being representative of two opposites, day/night, male/female. One of the unique things about the symbol is that within each side, there's a circle of the opposite color. The philosophy and the understanding is that with each of the opposites, there is always some of the other. The curved line between the two represents that there is fluidity between both of these opposites that exists in nature and that waxes and wanes. I have always seen that symbol as interesting when related to the trans patient or the transgender experience or just our own understanding of gender, that within this cultural, universal philosophy that is inherent in the Chinese medicine that we [use as our basis], that gender is fluid and that within both male and female there are aspects and attributes of the other. That's such a starting ground behind the treatments that we provide, to be so embracing of fluidity of gender and particularly in transgender." •

PATHWAYS TO WELLNESS IS LOCATED AT 142 BERKELEY STREET, BOSTON ON THE SECOND FLOOR. FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CALL 617-859-3036 OR CONNECT TO WWW.PATHWAYSBOSTON.ORG.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

FOR A RESEARCH STUDY OF HIV & BRAIN FUNCTION

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Upon completion of the study, you will be paid \$75 and will receive a free picture of your brain. Travel will be reimbursed.

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