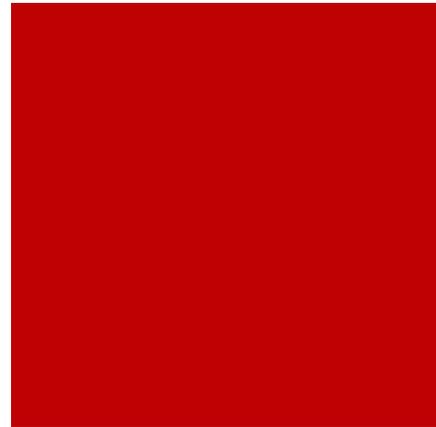
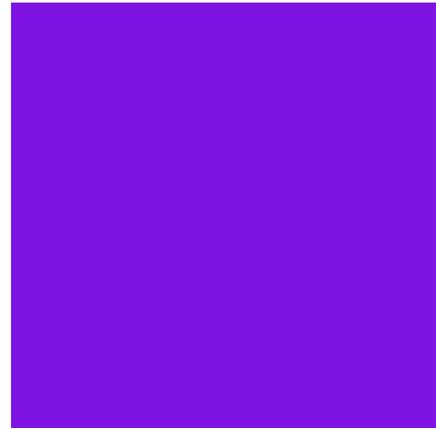


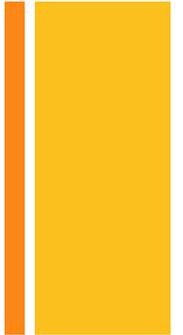


# Let's Talk About Sex!

Integrating sexual health conversations  
into health care services

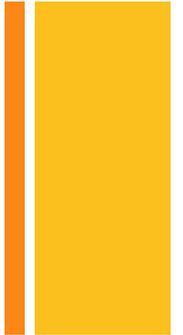


# + Activity



- What messages did you receive about sex when you were growing up?
- What messages do you receive about sex as an adult?
- How do these messages impact us in having proactive sexual health discussions with patients?

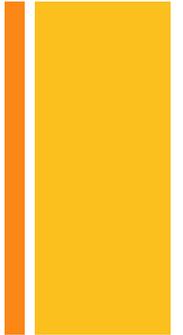
# + What's the big deal about sex?



- Sex affects every aspect of our existence
- We are all the result of 3 billion years of successful sex!
- Sex is the core of evolution
- Sex is key to good mental and physical health
- Too few providers are comfortable talking about sex!



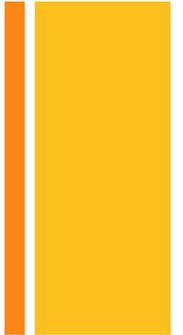
# What does it have to do with health?



- Sexual health is an essential element of patient-centered care.
- Taking sexual histories helps prevent disease
- It also strengthens the patient-provider relationship and helps encourage overall health and wellness.



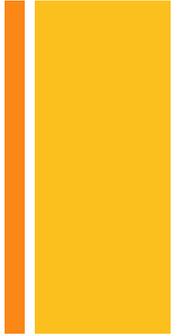
# Why does talking about sex give us the icks?



- “Ironically, it may require greater intimacy to discuss sex than to engage in it.” -National Academy of Medicine
- What makes these conversations uncomfortable?
- What hesitations do you have in bringing up sexual health with your patients?
- How can we work on building rapport and breaking these barriers?

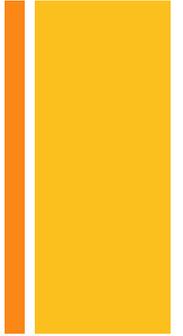


# Sex Negative to Sex Positive



- Many of us grew up in a sex-negative environment
- We must all work to be more sex-positive
- Sex positive means that we acknowledge and tackle the various concerns and risks associated with sexuality without reinforcing fear, shame or taboo.
- Sex-positive approaches strive to achieve ideal experiences, rather than solely working to prevent negative experiences.

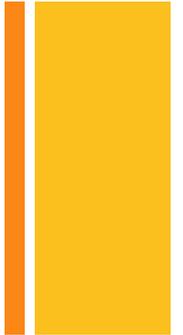
# + What is Sexual Health?



- Beyond STDs
- Holistic approach
- Talk about pleasure
- Interplay of overall physical health and sexual functioning
- Impact on relationships, mental health



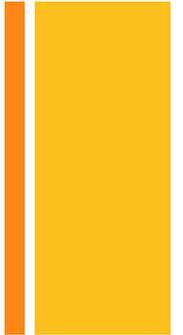
# World Health Organization 16 Sexual Rights Highlights (2014)



- The right to equality and non-discrimination
- The right to life, liberty, and security of the person
- The right to autonomy and bodily integrity
- The right to the highest attainable standard of health, including sexual health; with the possibility of pleasurable, satisfying, and safe sexual experiences.
- The right to comprehensive sexuality education
- The right to decide whether to have children, the number and spacing of children, and the information and means to do so.

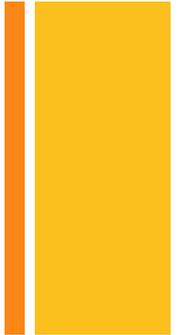


# CDC Green Paper Meeting (2011)



- Experts recommended adopting the entire 16 sexual right from WHO
- Federal government allowed adoption of 15 sexual rights, but not this one:
  - The right to the highest attainable standard of sexual health; with the possibility of pleasurable, satisfying, and safe sexual experience.
  - The US government did not agree that lease was a sexual right.
- We have the icks about sex on a national level!

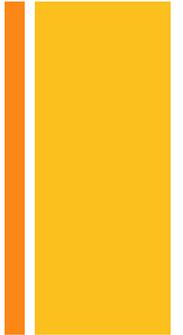
# + Cycle of Miscommunication



- Studies have shown that many patients expect their provider to bring up sexual health questions.
- Most providers expect their patients to bring up sexual health questions and concerns.
- This means that often, no one is bringing up sexual health questions and concerns!!
- This doesn't mean there aren't any, we're all just pretending.



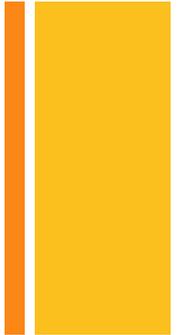
# How to Discuss Sexual Health



- Assess your own comfort discussing sex with various patient groups and identify any biases that you may have.
- Make your patient feel comfortable and establish rapport before asking sensitive questions.
- Use neutral and inclusive terms (e.g., “partner”) and pose your questions in a non-judgmental manner.
- Avoid making assumptions about your patient based on age, appearance, marital status, or any other factor.
- Try not to react overtly, even if you feel uncomfortable or embarrassed. Pay attention to your body language and posture.

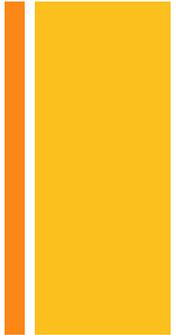


# How to Discuss Sexual Health



- Ask for and utilize preferred pronouns or terminology when talking to a transgender patient.
- Rephrase your question or briefly explain why you are asking a question if a patient seems offended or reluctant to answer.
- Use ubiquity statements to normalize the topics you are discussing. These statements help patients understand that sexual concerns are common.
- Ensure that you and your patient share an understanding of the terms being used to avoid confusion. If you are not familiar with a term your patient used, ask for an explanation.

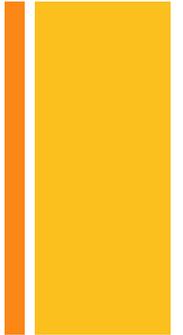
# + Framing the Conversation



- Framing the conversation:
  - Sample script: “I’m going to ask you a few questions about your sexual health. Since sexual health is very important to overall health, I ask all my adult patients these questions. Before I begin, do you have any questions or sexual concerns you’d like to discuss?”
  - Remain open to any questions or comments the patient has regarding their sexuality, including questions related to sexual pleasure.

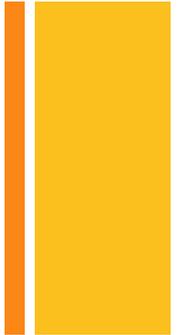


# Questions for Adolescents



- Ask all your adolescent patients aged 11 and older the following four sexual health questions.
  - What questions do you have about your body and/or sex?
  - Your body changes a lot during adolescence, and although this is normal, it can also be confusing. Some of my patients feel as though they're more of a boy or a girl, or even something else, while their body changes in another way. How has this been for you?
  - Some patients your age are exploring new relationships. Who do you find yourself attracted to?
  - Have you ever had sex with someone? By “sex” I mean vaginal, oral, or anal sex.

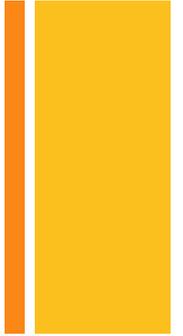
# + Questions for Adults



- What is your sexual orientation?
- What is your gender identity?
- What sex were you assigned at birth?
- Have you been sexually active in the last year? (If not) Have you ever been sexually active?
- Have you had sex with men, women, other genders, both, or all of the above?



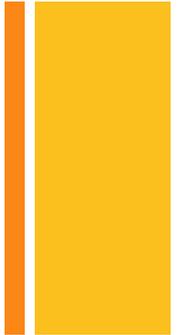
# Questions for Older Adults



- Patients age 60+ are often forgotten in sexual health conversations.
- Be sure to ask your older adult patients the same questions recommended for adults in general.
- Additionally, be sure to ask whether sex has changed for them in the past year or past several years, and if so, how?

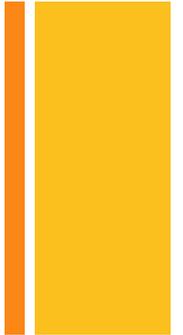


# Additional Questions to Ask



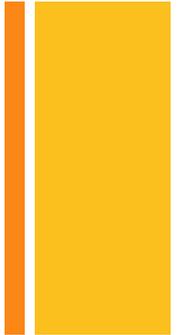
- Do you know if your partner has other sexual partners?
- In the past 3 months, have you had sex with someone you didn't know or just met?
- Have you ever been coerced or pressured into having sex?
- Have you or any of your partners used alcohol or drugs when you had sex?
- Have you ever exchanged sex for drugs, money, or material goods?
- Have you ever had an STI? If unsure, have you ever been tested?

# + Additional Questions



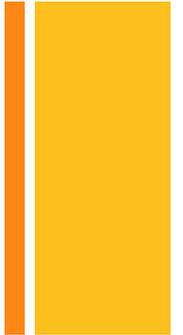
- How does sex feel for you?
- Do you find your sex life satisfying? Why or why not?
- Do you have any desire to have (more) children?
- If yes, how many would you like to have? When would you like to have them?
- If no, what are you doing to prevent pregnancy?

# + Letting Go of Judgment



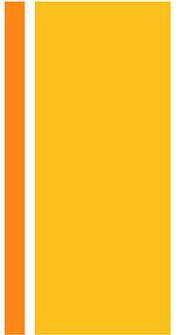
- The most important strategy is validation
- There is no such thing as “normal.” If it is part of the human experience, it is “normal.”
- It is important to maintain a sex-positive approach during these conversations
- Remember the WHO sexual rights and strive to support them
- If you seem uncomfortable, your patient will be uncomfortable

# + Letting Go of Labels



- Sex negativity can be deeply ingrained
- The brain seeks to define and categorize to avoid discomfort and confusion
- Labeling behavior as addictive, dangerous, out of control, unsafe, and unhealthy without the proper training and knowledge can alienate patients
- If you are concerned and unsure of what to do, refer patients to a sex therapist or other expert for further assessment rather than attempting to label, diagnose, and treat on your own.

# + Citations



- Altarum Institute. Sexual Health and Your Patients: A Provider's Guide. Washington, DC: Altarum Institute; 2016.
- Fenway Institute. Putting Sexual Health Into Primary Care Practice: A Systems Approach for Health Centers. Washington, DC: Fenway Institute; 2013.
- Solway E, Clark S, Singer D, Kirch M, Malani P. Let's Talk about Sex, National Poll on Healthy Aging, Institute for Healthcare Policy an Innovation, University of Michigan and Innovation. May 2018. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/2027.42/143212>
- Special thanks to Sallie Foley, LMSW, CST