

September 26, 2011

Letter to the Tufts Community

The Department of Health & Wellness is quite disturbed and disagrees vigorously with Keith Ablow, the psychiatrist who wrote an article and also appeared on national TV to assert his belief that parents should not allow their children to watch Chaz Bono on Dancing with the Stars since it might unduly influence them to consider becoming transgender to deal with the turmoil of late adolescence. He also used hurtful, and unfounded statements about the mental wellness of transgender individuals. There is no science to support his opinions. The fact that he advertises on his website that he has an affiliation with Tufts University School of Medicine as an assistant professor is very concerning to the medical and mental health professionals of Tufts Health and Wellness Service. Our service has no relationship with Dr. Ablow, nor do we share his beliefs in any way. We would never want our students to think we endorsed any of his irresponsible and unscientific assertions regarding the transgender community. In fact, we denounce them.

Tufts Health & Wellness affirms its core mission to support the educational mission of Tufts University by providing accessible and high quality health care for a diverse student population. We strive to maintain the physical, psychological, and social health of students through an interdisciplinary team approach of providing primary care, mental health care, and health education. Our values are confidentiality, respect for diversity, promotion of wellness, and continuous professional growth.

Health & Wellness operates from a community health model and believes that it is our responsibility to understand and respect differences so that we can provide the quality of care all of our students deserve. We take our charge seriously and devote significant staff time and training to areas where we feel like learning is needed.

Research has shown that groups who are marginalized or discriminated against tend to access health care less frequently and delay treatment, which can have a negative impact on length of disease and outcome. Further, they often have higher rates of medical and mental health conditions because of societal hate and discrimination, which then get attributed to them as inherent in their difference. In our setting, this is a tragic and unacceptable outcome of discrimination that must not stand.

The Health & Wellness Department on the Medford campus wants to reaffirm to you that our offices are always a place for *all* Tufts students to be treated for their medical and mental health needs in an environment that is safe and free of discrimination. Personal opinions hidden under the guise of medical expertise can be harmful to individuals' health. Please know that your concerns and basic humanity will be honored, appreciated and cherished within our health care setting.

Sincerely,

Michelle D. Bowdler, MSPH, Senior Director, Health & Wellness Services

On behalf of the staff