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Virginia Board of Medicine

Guidance Document on the Practice of Conversion Therapy

For the purposes of this guidance "conversion therapy" or "sexual orientation change efforts" is defined as any practice or treatment that seeks to change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity, including efforts to change behaviors or gender expressions or to eliminate or reduce sexual or romantic attractions or feelings toward individuals of any gender. "Conversion therapy" does not include counseling or therapy that provides assistance to a person undergoing gender transition or counseling or therapy that provides acceptance, support, and understanding of a person or facilitates a person's coping, social support, and identity exploration and development, including sexual-orientation-neutral interventions to prevent or address unlawful conduct or unsafe sexual practices, as long as such counseling or therapy does not seek to change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity in any direction.

In § 54.1-2915 of the Code of Virginia, the Board of Medicine is authorized to discipline a licensee for certain acts of unprofessional conduct, including:

> *12. Conducting his practice in a manner contrary to the standards of ethics of his branch of the healing arts;*
>
> *13. Conducting his practice in such a manner as to be a danger to the health and welfare of his patients or to the public;*

Leading professional medical and mental health associations have issued position and policy statements regarding conversion therapy/sexual orientation change efforts, especially with minors. Such statements have typically noted that the use of conversion therapy has not been shown to be effective or safe, may be harmful to a patient, and is considered to be unethical practice.

In a statement issued in 2019, the American Medical Association stated its opposition to the use of “reparative” or “conversion” therapy for sexual orientation or gender identity.” The AMA noted that conversion therapy is not a legitimate medical treatment and that is violates many important ethical principles, the foremost of which: “First, do no harm.”

Other medical societies and associations have also opposed conversion therapy for sexual orientation or gender identity. In 2018, the American Psychiatric Association reiterated its long-standing opposition to the practice of conversion therapy. Efforts to change one’s sexual orientation “represent a significant risk of harm by subjecting individuals to forms of treatment which have not been scientifically validated and by undermining self-esteem when sexual orientation fails to change.”

In a statement issued in 2018, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry stated that conversion therapy should not be part of any behavioral health treatment of children and

adolescents. The AACAP asserted that conversion therapies lack "scientific credibility and clinical utility," and that "there is evidence that such interventions are harmful."

The 2018 policy statement from the American Academy of Pediatrics supported a gender-affirmative care model and stated that reparative or conversion treatments have proven to be unsuccessful but also "deleterious" and "outside the mainstream of traditional medical practice."

In 2017, the American Osteopathic Association issued its position strongly opposing the practice of conversion therapy or any such technique aimed at changing a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. The AOA stated that "any effort by an osteopathic physician to participate in any SOCE [Sexual Orientation Change Efforts] is considered unethical."