Culture Brokering Case Study: Supporting Transgender Individuals

A new patient walks into the reception area of the Substance Abuse Counseling Clinic. There are several caseworkers and reception staff behind the counter who see the person arrive. The staff have questions about the individual’s gender – male or female? One of the staff member thinks the person is male and another thinks female. Each staff person refers to the individual using different pronouns.

During the intake meeting, the caseworker learns the person’s name is Armani, a gender-neutral name. After much careful consideration, the caseworker opts to use female pronouns and is not corrected. Armani confirms that their family is from Somalia. Armani is no longer living with family, currently homeless and living in and around the Boston area. Armani has limited contact with family; especially since most family members do not approve of the person Armani is dating. Armani indicates that some family members have told stories about how same-sex relationships are punishable by death. The caseworker continues to be very anxious about offending Armani and uncertain on what questions can be asked.

When asked about medications and other medical information, Armani is vague and seems uncomfortable discussing medical history. Armani finally discloses recreational use of prescription and nonprescription drugs as well as past thoughts of suicide. When mental health support options are mentioned, Armani is quick to react negatively and refuses to discuss the topic further. At the conclusion of the session, the caseworker makes a referral to a psychiatrist based on self disclosure of depression and what they perceive as a gender identity disorder. Armani never show up for the appointments, and does not respond to any further communication.