Joint Commission focuses on improving care for LGBT patients

New guide provides strategies, examples, resources for hospitals

(OAKBROOK TERRACE, Ill. – November 8, 2011) A new field guide from The Joint Commission urges U.S. hospitals to create a more welcoming, safe and inclusive environment that contributes to improved health care quality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) patients and their families. The guide, *Advancing Effective Communication, Cultural Competence, and Patient-and Family-Centered Care for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Community: A Field Guide*, was developed with support from The California Endowment.

*Advancing Effective Communication, Cultural Competence, and Patient-and Family-Centered Care for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Community: A Field Guide* features a compilation of strategies, practice examples, resources and testimonials designed to help hospitals in their efforts to improve communication and provide more patient-centered care to their LGBT patients. In addition, the field guide offers information to help hospitals identify gaps, safety risks, and areas needing improvement, as well as information to strengthen outreach efforts to the LGBT community. The field guide can serve as an educational resource that hospitals can use to develop staff training, as well as for compliance efforts related to laws, regulations and standards.

“All patients, regardless of social or personal characteristics, should be treated with dignity and respect and should feel comfortable providing any information relevant to their care, including information about sexual orientation and gender identity,” says Jerod M. Loeb, Ph.D., executive vice president, Division of Healthcare Quality Evaluation, The Joint Commission.

“Every hospital and health care organization is unique and no single approach works best, but The Joint Commission encourages hospitals to adopt a combination of the strategies and
practices discussed and to use these examples as a foundation for creating processes, policies and programs that are sensitive and inclusive of LGBT patients and families.”

Research has demonstrated that LGBT patients often do not receive the same level of care as other patients due to social stigma, lack of awareness and insensitivity to their unique needs. Members of the LGBT community often have less access to insurance and health care services, experience higher rates of smoking, alcohol and substance abuse, and are at higher risk for mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, sexually transmitted diseases and increased incidence of some cancers. In addition, LGBT patients face other barriers to equitable care, such as refusals of care, delayed or substandard care, mistreatment, inequitable policies and practices, little or no inclusion in health outreach or education, and inappropriate restrictions or limits on visitation.

Earlier this year, The Joint Commission implemented its patient-centered communication standards to specifically prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression and to ensure access to a support person of the patient’s choice – two critical issues to the LGBT community. Although the standards and The Joint Commission’s 2010 guide *Advancing Effective Communication, Cultural Competence and Patient- and Family-Centered Care: A Roadmap for Hospitals* were designed to encompass many issues in LGBT health care, the need to provide more information, guidance and education to health care organizations to address specific LGBT issues was apparent. The Joint Commission brought together representatives from professional associations, key stakeholders and LGBT health care advocacy groups to identify and discuss how to build upon recommendations and practice examples in The *Roadmap for Hospitals* and tailor these with specific suggestions and strategies geared toward the unique health needs and concerns of those in the LGBT community.

*Advancing Effective Communication, Cultural Competence, and Patient-and Family-Centered Care for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Community: A Field Guide* is available for download at [http://www.jointcommission.org/lgbt/](http://www.jointcommission.org/lgbt/). For more information, please e-mail The Joint Commission at lgbt@jointcommission.org.

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Founded in 1951, The Joint Commission seeks to continuously improve health care for the public, in collaboration with other stakeholders, by evaluating health care organizations and inspiring them to excel in providing safe and effective care of the highest quality and value. The Joint Commission evaluates and accredits more than 19,000 health care organizations and programs in the United States, including more than 10,300 hospitals and home care organizations, and more than 6,500 other health care organizations that provide long term care, behavioral health care, laboratory and ambulatory care services. The Joint Commission also provides certification of more than 2,000 disease-specific care programs, primary stroke centers, and health care staffing services. An independent, not-for-profit organization, The Joint Commission is the nation's oldest and largest standards-setting and accrediting body in health care. Learn more about The Joint Commission at [www.jointcommission.org](http://www.jointcommission.org).