



‘It was all about making me feel comfortable in my own skin’

Tyler Slaughter (he/him) knew he had come to the right place the moment our clinic staff at Country Doctor welcomed him to his first appointment.

They asked him what name he'd like to be called, not assuming it was the same as the one on his insurance card. They asked the question with a matter-of-fact ease that made him feel welcome — seen and heard in ways he'd never experienced before. Not in a doctor's office. Not anywhere.

“It was all about making me feel comfortable in my own skin,” says Tyler, who became a Country Doctor patient about three years ago.

He doesn't mind the nearly hourlong drive it takes them to get from his home near Federal Way to Country Doctor. He goes the distance because they know he'll receive not only excellent medical care here, but also an uncommon level of dignity and respect developed over many

years of caring for transgender patients and others in the LGBTQ community.

Growing up, Tyler never felt like he was a girl, despite his female anatomy. For years, “tomboy” seemed close enough. It wasn't until midway through high school that he realized he didn't have to keep pretending. He took his time at the start of his gender-reaffirmation journey, “which really meant wearing a lot more plaid,” he chuckles.

“And flannel!” his Mom, Lili (she/her), chimes in.

After a year of counseling and lots of thoughtful family discussions about the pros and cons of gender transitioning, they all decided — together — that the next step for Tyler would be testosterone treatments.

Lili remembers one of the moments that gave her confidence they were doing the right thing. “I was asking my daughter, ‘Why do you want to become a boy?’ and he said, ‘Mom, I don't want to become a boy. I think I've always been a boy.’”

Tyler's nurses at Country Doctor helped him conquer a lifelong fear of needles so he can administer his testosterone shots himself. His mom also learned how to give him his “T shots” every other week, in case he ever has trouble self-administering them.

“We all wanted to love and support Tyler in this process together,” says Katie Hester (she/her), Tyler's primary care provider. “It was really special

to us to see a young person so supported by his family and to be a part of that.”

Step by step, a gender navigation specialist helped Tyler jump through the many hoops that insurance companies require before granting coverage of treatments like the breast-removal surgery Tyler is slated to undergo this fall.

Tyler and his family know the path he's chosen won't always be easy. But they're grateful that no matter what challenges they face, they can count on Country Doctor to be there for them in all the ways that affirm how important this journey is — for Tyler, for his health and well-being, for his future.

Dear friends,

For nearly 50 years, Carolyn Downs and Country Doctor have shared a deep commitment to welcoming all who needed care. We've made intentional efforts to welcome members of the LGBTQ community throughout our history.

Founded in 1979, the volunteer-run Seattle Gay Clinic chose Country Doctor as its partner when it was looking for a location, treating patients out of an iconic old firehouse on 15th Avenue East for many years.

I remember climbing the stairs of that old firehouse to receive services there in the 1980s, when one in five gay men in Seattle were living with HIV. Many could not find welcoming and competent health care, so Country Doctor stepped up and became the nonprofit leader in HIV care.

Today, we care for 450 HIV-positive patients, directly and through partnership with the BABES Network, a program of YWCA Seattle that provides peer support for women living with HIV. In addition to providing HIV prevention services, we work toward a goal of helping patients achieve viral undetectability, regardless of their income, insurance status, ethnicity, or gender.

Much like people living with HIV at the dawn of the AIDS epidemic, many of our patients today who identify as transgender, non-binary, gender nonconforming, or gender-diverse turn to Country Doctor because it's the only place where they feel safe and welcomed.

Trans health care is an ordinary part of primary care at Carolyn Downs and Country Doctor, provided with competence and without stigma. We meet every patient's medical needs with profound respect for everything that makes them unique.

One-third of our senior staff and board of directors identify as LGBTQ, along with many of you who support our work so generously. Thank you for standing with us in our belief that health care is a right that everyone deserves — today, tomorrow, and always.



Raleigh Watts

Raleigh Watts (he/him)
Executive Director,
Country Doctor Community
Health Centers

Deepening our commitment to gender-affirming care

Carolyn Downs and Country Doctor share a rich history of providing high-quality of care to all patients. It is our mission to serve the most vulnerable and marginalized members of our community.

We are proud to be expanding the services we offer to our transgender, non-binary, gender diverse and gender nonconforming patients, who face needless barriers to receiving medical care and deserve to thrive.

Here are some of the ways we are deepening our commitment to gender-affirming care:

- A Gender Health Navigator now helps patients at both Carolyn Downs Family Medical Center and Country Doctor Community Clinic, assisting with the complex process insurance companies require for coverage of gender-affirming medical interventions.
- Another nurse has joined our Gender Health team, allowing us to serve more trans and gender nonconforming patients. (Learn more about Meg Cummings in the Provider Q&A on the next page.)
- Fourth-year University of Washington medical students in an LGBTQ clerkship spend one day a week at Country Doctor, gaining hands-on experience with gender-affirming care and other aspects of LGBTQ medicine.
- The Carolyn Downs clinic site for the Swedish Family Medicine Residency at Cherry Hill provides training in gender-affirming care.
- We recognize our commitment to providing a safe and supportive environment for our patients includes recruiting openly trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming providers to our staff.

PROVIDER Q&A



Meet Meg the newest member of our gender health team

Name: Meg Cummings (she/her or they/them)

Job Title: Gender Health & Triage Nurse

Joined Country Doctor: July 2018 as a triage nurse

What drew you to nursing and your focus on gender health?

I'm a nurturer by nature, and I gravitated to this role because I know this work to be lifesaving and necessary. I have known too many amazing transgender and gender non-conforming people who choose not seek healthcare for fear they will not be accepted by their care providers. Your gender identity should not impact your access to individualized, dignified, and approachable healthcare. In fact, it is your right as a human being to access non-discriminatory healthcare. I am honored to be playing a part in helping Country Doctor expand how we offer inclusive care to our transgender and gender non-conforming patients.

What do you love about your job?

We have a fantastically supportive and compassionate team of care providers working here, from the front desk to the back office. We take care of people, no matter who they are, regardless of their ability to pay. I love that every day, I get to contribute to something pretty darn close to universal healthcare. I have greatly valued the experience of supporting patients in a primary care setting that focuses on preventative and holistic care throughout our patients' lifespan and gamut of lived experiences. It is extremely gratifying to be on a first name basis with patients and to know them as whole people, not just diagnoses. Long-term, we all live healthier lives when we know we have someone who is always on our team.

What are some things you do to make your patients feel safe and respected?

I start with the simple courtesies. When I'm first getting to know a patient, we exchange first names and preferred pronouns and talk a little bit about what they're bringing with them to our visit that day. I practice primarily being a listener in visits. It keeps the ego out of the provider-patient relationship and makes people feel safe and heard. I remind patients, no matter how many times they need to hear it, that anything they ask for help with is not ever a burden on us if it helps reduce a barrier for them. That is a huge focus here at Country Doctor: reducing the innumerable barriers to care and wellbeing for trans and gender non-conforming individuals.

What role do you see Country Doctor playing in making gender-affirming health care more of the norm than the exception?

I'm so excited to grow and refine our model of care designed to celebrate and affirm all gender identities and expressions. As we improve access to this care, we also bolster our reputation as a safe, completely supportive place to access trans competent care. We lead by example.

What do you do outside Country Doctor?

a) For fun? I grew up gardening, and my love for getting my hands in the dirt and growing food has stayed with me. I also love live music, going to karaoke, reading tarot, and taking my border-beagle pup on adventures.

b) For your health? Yoga. Being outside more often than I am inside. Swimming in lakes.

c) To make a difference in your community? For human beings, this work. For Momma Earth, gardening and beekeeping at the Beacon Food Forest, a community-driven, open-harvest edible food forest on the edge of Jefferson Park in Beacon Hill.



Give the gift of community health

During this season of giving, your gifts to Country Doctor Community Health Centers:

- Ensure that more people receive comprehensive care in a compassionate atmosphere of dignity and respect, regardless of their ability to pay.

- Advance the work we do to respond to emerging needs with innovative approaches.
- Make our vision of a healthier, more just community a reality.

Make your tax-deductible gift today by mailing us a check in the enclosed envelope or donate online at www.countrydoctor.org.

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