

NBA Veteran Jason Collins Comes Out As Gay

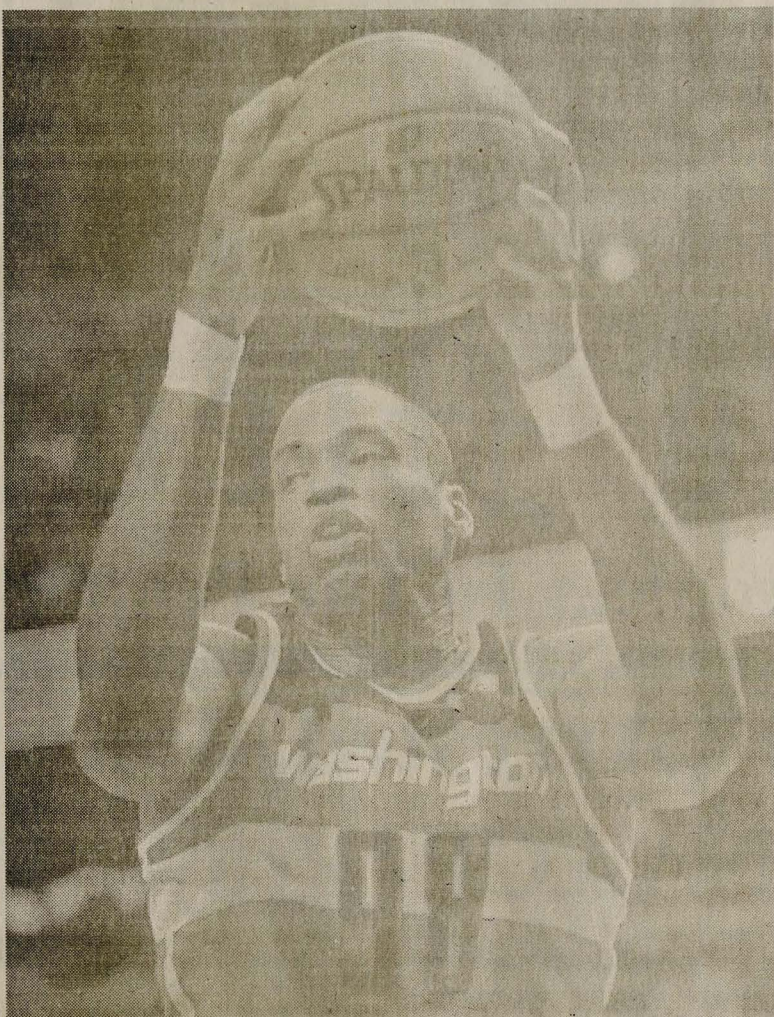
NEW YORK (AP) - NBA veteran Jason Collins became the first active male player in the four major American professional sports to come out as gay.

The 34-year-old center, who has played for six teams in 12 seasons, wrote a first-person account posted on Sports Illustrated's website Monday. Collins finished this past season with the Washington Wizards and is now a free agent. He says he wants to keep playing.

"If I had my way, someone else would have already done this," he writes. "Nobody has, which is why I'm raising my hand."

Collins played in a Final Four for Stanford and reached two NBA Finals. His twin brother, Jarron, was also a longtime NBA center. Jason says he came out to his brother last summer.

NBA Commissioner David Stern said in a statement: "Jason has been a widely respected player and teammate throughout his career and we are proud he has assumed the leadership mantle on this very important



Jason Collins

issue." Among those offering

support on social media was former first daughter Chelsea Clinton, a friend from Stanford. She tweeted: "Very proud of my friend Jason Collins for having the strength & courage to be the first openly gay player in the NBA."

Mostly a backup in his career, Collins has averaged 3.6 points and 3.8 rebounds for the Nets, Grizzlies, Timberwolves, Hawks, Celtics and Wizards. He was traded from Boston to Washington in February. Collins was the 18th pick in the first round of the 2001 NBA draft.

Several male athletes have previously come out after they retired, including the NBA's John Amaechi, the NFL's Esera Tuaolo and Major League Baseball's Billy Bean. But Collins is the first to do so while planning to continue playing.

Cantwell Leads Effort To Fight Crime

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Senators Maria Cantwell (D-WA) and Charles E. Grassley (R-IA) led a bipartisan coalition of 48 senators in support of continued investment in a crucial tool for Washington state law enforcement in their efforts to address crime, drug trafficking and gangs.

The coalition, in a letter sent Friday to Senate appropriators, requested that funding be maintained in the fiscal year 2014 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies (CJS) appropriations bill for the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (Byrne JAG) program. This key program helps states and communities across the country reduce crime, prevent juvenile delinquency and reduce recidivism.

The program is a partnership among federal, state and local governments that tailors federal law enforcement grants to the needs of different communities. It supports a broad range of activities to prevent and control crime and improve the criminal justice system that include: law enforcement programs; prosecution and court programs; prevention and education programs; corrections and community corrections programs; drug treatment programs; and planning, evaluation and technology improvement programs.

"It is clear to us that the strong foundation of federal, state, and local partnerships built from the Byrne JAG program remains as vital as ever," wrote the Senators in a letter to the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies. "Byrne JAG-funded programs facilitate cross-governmental intelligence, and information sharing on terror and criminal threats, drug and human trafficking organizations and sexual predators. This collaboration is essential to address today's criminal networks that cross city, state and even international boundaries. With over 18,000 law

enforcement agencies in the U.S., cross-jurisdictional learning and coordination cannot happen effectively without federal support," the Senators continued in the letter. "We know of your steadfast commitment to the Byrne JAG program in years past, and we ask for your continued support in the fiscal year 2014 Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies (CJS) appropriations bill."

In Washington state, Byrne JAG investments have been used to continue vital law enforcement programs that go after criminal gangs and facilitate drug treatment during a time when local and state budgets for law enforcement officials and prosecutors across the state have been cut. These grants can be used for state and local initiatives, technical assistance, training, personnel, equipment, supplies, contractual support, and criminal justice information systems.

In Snohomish County, Byrne JAG grants have consistently been used to aid the Snohomish Regional Drug & Gang Task Force. Between 2008 and 2012, these investments were used to support operations that led to the seizure of more than 78,000 grams of cocaine and more than 35,000 grams of methamphetamine. During that time, the Task Force made 886 drug arrests in Snohomish County.

"With sequestration forcing budget cuts at every level, funds from the Byrne grant are needed now more than ever," said Snohomish County Sheriff John Lovick. "Our communities depend on these funds to help law enforcement fight crime and to help courts find justice for victims of crime. From protecting the children in our schools from violence to preventing seniors from becoming victims of fraud, Byrne grant funds improve the quality of life for all of our citizens."

In Benton and Franklin counties, Byrne JAG grants support the Tri-City Metro Drug Task Force, which is dedicated to

the disruption of narcotic trafficking, illegal gun sales and gang activity in the region. In 2012, these investments were used to support operations that led to 91 arrests and seizures of more than 3,000 grams of methamphetamine and more than 1.3 million grams of poppies.

"The Tri-City Metro Drug Task Force is a collaboration of local efforts which started in 1988 and is primarily funded through federal assistance," said Kennewick Police Chief Ken Hohenberg. "Federal support is more crucial now than ever in combating violence in our communities due to criminal gangs and their involvement in dealing drugs to support their efforts. Senator Cantwell continues to lead our efforts in bringing federal resources and funding to our communities to support our crime fighting in the area of violence and criminal gang activity."

In Pierce County Byrne JAG grants support local anti-gang and drug units as well as domestic violence prosecutions during a time when budgets for law enforcement officials and prosecutors across the state have been cut. These grants can be used for state and local initiatives, technical assistance, training, personnel, equipment, supplies, contractual support, and criminal justice information systems. But investments in the program have been reduced by over one-third in the past few years.

"In Pierce County, Byrne JAG grants support the prosecution of gang crimes, drug crimes, and domestic violence offenders during a time when budgets for law enforcement officials and prosecutors across the state have been cut," said Mark Lindquist, Pierce County Prosecutor. "Our Gang Unit has convicted hundreds of violent gang members, earned long prison sentences, and reduced gang crimes by over 70 percent in our county. Our community is safer thanks to support from the Byrne JAG grants."

New Guidelines Issued To Improve Cultural Competency

By Maya Rhodan
NNPA Washington Correspondent

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - The Department of Health and Human Services has updated its standards for cultural competency in health care, hoping to narrow the racial and ethnic health disparities common throughout the United States.

"This provides another opportunity to significantly improve health disparities," Dr. Howard Koh, the agency's Assistant Secretary for Health, said at a press conference on Wednesday. "Care needs to honor culture, it needs to be effective, understandable and respectful. Care needs to be delivered with 'CLAS.'"

National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health and Health Care - also known as

CLAS Standards - serve as guidelines for facilitating "culturally and linguistically appropriate health services."

The new standards were announced last week by HHS's Office of Minority Health at a gathering of health care organizations the Kaiser Family Foundation office in Washington.

In 2000, under the Bush administration, the Office of Minority Health published the first set of standards, which were updated in 2010, to better cater the health care system to the nation's increasingly diverse population.

The recently updated standards include 15 guidelines for effective cultural communication between patients and caregivers, including a "principal standard" that encourages hospitals to provide service that is "responsive to diverse cultural health beliefs and practices, preferred languages, health literacy, and other communication needs."

Other standards include:

- Recruiting more culturally diverse leadership staff
- Offering language assistance at no cost to the patient
- Collecting and maintaining accurate demographic data
- Partnering with the community to design cultural and linguistic appropriate policies.

As the U.S. population becomes more diverse, with Whites becoming a minority in the U.S. by 2050, cultural competence in health care is being considered crucial to ending health disparities.

And those disparities are striking.

Black babies are 2.3 times more likely to die in infancy, Asians are 2.5 times more likely

to develop liver cancer, Latinos are three times more likely to be uninsured and Black men are seven times more likely to be diagnosed with HIV than their White counterparts.

Currently, seven of the 15 most populated cities are majority minority yet African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and Asians continue to receive lower quality care than their White counterparts according to National Healthcare Disparities reports.

"Health is the most important thing we have regardless of our race, socioeconomic status," said Dr. Nadine Gracia, director of the office of minority health at the Department of Health and Human Services. "Nothing more essential to opportunity than good health."

In a 2002 report on Cultural Competence in Health Care presented by the Commonwealth Fund, a New York based foundation, states, "As we become a more ethnically and racially diverse nation, health care systems and providers need to reflect on and respond to patients' varied perspectives, values, beliefs, and behaviors about health and well-being. Failure to understand and manage sociocultural differences may have significant health consequences on minority groups in particular."

A huge barrier between patients and health care providers occurs among non-English speakers. According to the National Health Disparity Report, Spanish-speakers are more likely to not have health insurance and are also more likely to report poor communication with nurses.

"Culture is language - it's

the way that we through signs, customs, beliefs, practices present ourselves to other people, understand other people," said Leon Rodriguez, director of the office of civil rights at HHS. "Proper communication is not just a civil rights issue, it's about delivering the best quality care - this is all about delivering good care, this all about good business."

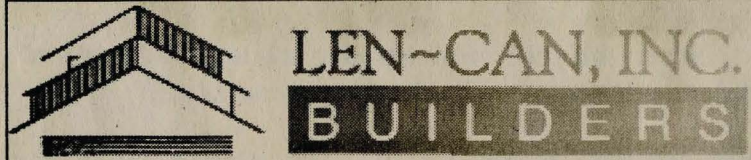
Although helpful, the standards are not mandatory; they are merely a set of guidelines put in place to assist the medical community better serve people of color.

Studies have shown that cultural competency training improves the patient-healthcare provider relationship. However only six states have legislation that requires or suggests cultural competence training: Maryland, Washington, Connecticut, New Mexico, California, and New Jersey.

Five states, including Illinois and Florida where 15 and 20 percent of the total populations are uninsured respectively, have vetoed or denied such legislation. Iowa, Colorado, and Oregon also followed suit.

The authors of the standards believe that if they can get hospitals and health care providers to adopt their standards, both the patients and the medical community will be better served.

"We hope over time this will be good for practice and good business," Koh said. "If every organization can at least start by saying we embrace these values and get leadership to infuse these values throughout everyday work, we can begin to gather more data that show that this is not only good practice, but it's good for business."



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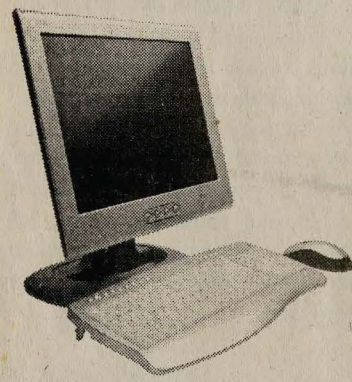


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