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Psychologists warn against therapy that tries to make gays straight

By The Associated Press

NEW YORK — The American Psychological Association said Wednesday that mental-health professionals should not tell gay clients they can become straight through therapy or other treatments.

Instead, the group urged therapists to consider multiple options — that could range from celibacy to switching churches — for helping clients whose sexual orientation and religious faith conflict.

In a resolution adopted on a 125-to-4 vote by the group's governing council and in a report based on two years of research, the 150,000-member association put itself on record as opposing "reparative therapy," which seeks to change sexual orientation.

No evidence exists that such change is likely, says the report, and some research suggests efforts to produce change could be harmful, inducing depression and suicidal tendencies.

The group had criticized reparative therapy in the past, but a six-member task force added weight to this position by examining 83 studies on sexual-orientation change conducted since 1960. Its report was endorsed by the governing council in Toronto, where the association's annual meeting is being held this weekend.

The report breaks new ground in its detailed and nuanced assessment of how therapists should deal with gay clients struggling to remain loyal to a religious faith that disapproves of homosexuality.

In dealing with gay clients from conservative faiths, says the report, therapists should be "very cautious" about suggesting treatments aimed at altering their same-sex attractions.

One of the largest organizations promoting the possibility of changing sexual orientation is Exodus International, a network of ministries whose core message is "Freedom from homosexuality through the power of Jesus Christ."

Its president, Alan Chambers, describes himself as someone who "overcame unwanted same-sex attraction." He expressed satisfaction with parts of the report that emerged.

"It's a positive step; simply respecting someone's faith is a huge leap in the right direction," Chambers said. "But I'd go further. Don't deny the possibility that someone's feelings might change."

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