

**Porterbrook Clinic**

Sheffield Care Trust

# Support with **Gender Dysphoria**

## Gender Dysphoria and Re-assignment Options

Information for Users of our service

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## **Introduction**

Terms such as gender dysphoria and transsexualism have been used interchangeably to describe the condition in which people not only feel trapped in the body and gender that they have been born in, but who actually seek to change their gender as well. We will refer to this condition as gender dysphoria throughout this leaflet.

Gender dysphoria is a frustrating condition for anyone to live with, as it is likely to be misunderstood by most people, including perhaps even professionals. It is certainly not a mental illness or sexual perversion. It differs from transvestism, a condition in which the person simply feels comfortable when dressed in clothes of the opposite sex. We still do not know the cause of gender dysphoria and there is no 'cure' even though the first 'sex change' operations took place in the 1950s. Several things are however, available in the way of help from the Sheffield gender dysphoria team.

## **Specialist Psychotherapy**

The Consultant in Sexual Medicine, Clinic doctors, and Psychotherapists are available to assist and support you in clarifying your hopes and expectations by providing help to enable you to survive the transition in your chosen role for a minimum of one year. They monitor your progress and link up with the gender panel. If you have any problems or difficulties, they may also be able to offer advice. They do not on their own decide whether you are to go ahead to start hormones or have surgery or not.

People with gender dysphoria often believe that professionals do not understand the need for urgent surgery or their conviction of being trapped in the wrong body. This is rarely the case. The greatest challenge facing you will be from ordinary people you meet in the supermarket, on the street, buses etc, rather than from the professionals. Living in the chosen role comfortably prepares you psychologically and socially for life in your chosen role before any surgery can be considered. You must appear and be accepted by others, in your chosen role. Ongoing support by the team is essential if you are to be assisted in the transition and made aware of the irreversible consequences.

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### ***Speech and Language Therapy***

The aim of speech and language therapy is to enable you to work towards a voice which is more appropriate for your chosen gender role. Exercises will be given to encourage this change to take place (voice coaching).

### ***Image Consultant***

We invite you to have some appointments with our Consultant who will advise you on the opportunities available for your external appearance, mannerisms and behaviour. Some of this work is on a one-to-one basis, and some in a small group with others who can share experiences with you.

### ***Our Lay Member***

We offer an impartial and listening ear to help you ensure appropriate services are available and to offer guidance when appropriate.

### ***Clinic Nurse***

The nurse will administer questionnaires at the initial appointment and prior to the gender panel meeting. He also monitors your blood results, weight and blood pressure.

### ***Clinic Secretary***

The clinic secretary is available to help you with any issues you feel need to be presented to the clinic before or in preparation for your next appointment date. Both these staff are able to reassure and guide you on non-clinical matters and to offer general advice.

### ***District Nurse***

The input into your life that this member of the team may give you will only become evident to you after surgery. The district nurse will support and care for you both before and post-operatively and guide you through the process of healing. She may also, with your permission, be able to act as an advocate at any surgery follow-up appointments.

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## ***Electrolysis and Laser Treatment***

Sympathetic local beauty parlours can assist in electrolysis and laser treatments. Please check prices, services, hygiene, condition etc perhaps with others who are going through these treatments before proceeding. Make sure you use reputable people only. Electrolysis is a slow expensive method, but probable the best method to remove hair. A good salon can also help with make-up application etc. This services is not provided for under the NHS.

## ***The Gender Panel***

This consists of several difference professional working with people with gender dysphoria. This includes our doctors, our psychotherapists, our speech therapists, our image consultant and group facilitator and our clinic technician, a lay member, plus a district nurse and this takes place four times a year. Every person referred for assessment of gender dysphoria is discussed by this panel (after at least three months) and a decision is made about the appropriateness to proceed into the 'Real Life Experience'. If accepted, certain criteria must be followed, such as living in the chosen

role for a minimum period of twelve months. Informing your relatives, friends and partner that you will proceed with gender reassignment may be a difficult experience. You will be invited to share with us that you are ready for surgery. There is no way to speed up this process, as surgery is irreversible. A flowchart of the process will be made available to you once you start to visit the clinic.

## ***Hormones***

All humans have hormones appropriate to their birth gender. Changing one's gender will, therefore, involve taking hormones of the chosen sex. Hormones are usually started once an individual has been accepted by the gender dysphoria panel as having the condition. Hormones must only be taken as prescribed by the Consultant in Sexual Medicine or Associate Specialist and under their regular supervision e.g. blood pressure and weight monitoring and regular blood tests, as complications may arise in some cases.

Hormones should NEVER be taken without your doctor's involvement. Generally, female hormones help to develop the female shape with redistribution of body fat, modest breast

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development, produce finer hair and reduce body hair. Male hormones help with male distribution of body hair, growth of facial hair, deepening of the voice and reducing or stopping menstruation. Hormones may need to be taken for a long time, even after surgery is complete. You will be asked to sign a consent form indicating your awareness of the potential dangers of opposite sex hormone therapy. Separate leaflets are available with greater information about the hormones used in the clinic. Issues regarding gamete storage will be discussed with you before starting hormone therapy.

### ***Changing Facilities***

The clinic is able to offer changing facilities for those patients who wish to change clothing when attending the out patient services.

### ***Help from Voluntary Organisations and Support Groups***

Several voluntary organisations such as The Gender Trust, The Beaumont Society, F to M Network, and Press for Change can provide literature and support. They provide information and leaflets. Family support networks also exist and we can

give information on organisations such as GIRES and Depend. We can provide you with some information which is constantly updated in the clinic resources leaflet, available from members of the clinic staff.

### ***Legal Issues***

Most documents can be changed by Deed of Poll. The name on your birth certificate is subject to the regulations of the Gender Recognition Bill, 2004.

Please note that the clinic expressly insists on a need to have correspondence with other health care practitioners during your care and treatment in the clinic, even if a GRC is issued. If you are not in agreement to this, you must let us know in writing and seek our response.

### ***Surgery***

Once the gender panel has received a confirmatory second opinion from another Consultant who specialises in this field, a referral will be made to a preferred surgeon. He or she will see you before deciding if it is appropriate for confirmation surgery to take place and whether or not you are physically fit for surgery. It is necessary to reduce/stop smoking, take regular gentle exercise

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and keep your weight stable so as not to delay surgery. Operations are usually done under general anaesthetic. Most people will, at the very least, require the genital organs of their chosen sex.

Details about the operations are available in separate leaflets.

Other operations can include breast implants and 'shaving of the Adams apple' for men transitioning to become a woman. Breast removal (mastectomy) and hysterectomy are usually planned for women transitioning to become a man. Surgery tries to get as near as possible to the birth genital organs of the chosen sex. You will never be able to father a child (for those becoming a man) or have children (for those becoming a woman).

Surgery tries to preserve the ability to have orgasms as far as possible. Surgical complications can occasionally occur and may need corrective surgery. The surgeon will usually arrange to see you once the panel has agreed your referral, but will only perform the operation once the panel has given him the go-ahead and funding to do so has been obtained from the purchasing health group. Our district nurse is involved at this stage.

## **Governance**

We are part of the Midlands and North England G3 Group.

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## NOTES

