

# Porterbrook Clinic

Sheffield Care Trust

## Support with **Gender Dysphoria**

### Androgens

Information for Users of our service

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### ***Why do I need to take hormones?***

All humans have hormones appropriate to their birth gender. You will therefore need to take hormones to re-assign to your chosen gender. To begin with, we will need to take some blood tests as a base-line measure and arrange for an ultrasound scan of your ovaries.

### ***What changes to my body can I expect to see?***

You will see a redistribution of body fat resulting in a thickening of neck and shoulders. There will be increased growth of body and facial hair and male pattern baldness may develop. Over a period of time, your voice may deepen. As ovarian function is suppressed, menstruation will cease. If this does not happen, ask your doctor about GnRH agonist therapy. Your breasts may slightly decrease in size or shape. You may experience an increase in your sex drive and an enlargement of the clitoris.

### ***Gonadorelin Analogues***

Gonadorelin analogues (also known as GnRH agonists) inhibit the production of oestrogen and testosterone. Common side effects include loss of libido, hot flushes, increase sweating and in women dyspareunia (painful intercourse).

Other common side effects include headache, rashes, changes in breast size, high blood pressure, weight changes and depression. Bone pain and difficulties passing water may be experienced.

### ***Gamete Storage***

You may wish to consider asking us to arrange storage of gametes. This is not funded by all Health Authorities. If this is a concern, please feel free to discuss it with your doctor or at the clinic.

### ***Are there any side-effects to taking hormones and are they dangerous to my health?***

Although androgens have been used for several years, the possible long-term effects are not known. After reading this leaflet and discussing it with the clinical staff in this service, you will be aware of additional treatment options and possible harmful effects. You will need to sign a form to consent with this treatment, after weighing up the possible harmful effects against the likely advantages to you.

You may or may not experience any of the following side-effects:- retention of water and sodium in your body causing weight gain and/or swelling of the feet and fingers, increased bone growth, rise

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in blood pressure, skin changes such as acne, rashes or facial flushing, there may also be increased cholesterol and body fat levels, emotional changes such as increased aggressiveness and fluctuating moods. These are all more common; less common side-effect include obesity, blood clots and other cardiovascular disease (such as heart attacks and stroke), liver tumour, cysts or jaundice, depression or other mental health problems, sleep apnoea, decreased carbohydrate tolerance and increased production of red blood cells. Osteoporosis (bone loss) may occur.

It is very important that you inform the doctor prescribing the hormones of any past or current family and personal medical problems, especially a history of thrombosis or clots or breast cancer.

### ***What should I do if I experience any problems or if I have any worries or concerns whilst taking hormones?***

Some side-effects of hormone therapy are life-threatening and you therefore should not hesitate to contact your General Practitioner (GP) if you experience any side-effects whilst taking hormone treatment. You may also wish to contact the Gender Clinic for advice.

**If you experience pain or discomfort in your calf, chest pain, breathlessness or headaches, do not delay in seeing your doctor.**

### ***How long will it take for me to see a change in my appearance?***

Changes vary individually and the time involved also varies. Some changes may occur within 6-8 weeks such as voice changes, which are permanent. Between 3-6 months there is some hypertrophy or growth of the clitoris. There is redistribution of fat after 6-12 months making your body shape different and hair growth and redistribution takes 9-18 months to be noticeable.

### ***How long do I need to take hormones for?***

Hormones will need to be taken for life, even after surgery is complete. The dose of hormones is usually lower after surgery.

### ***How is the medication given?***

There are a variety of different drugs and these can be taken in a number of ways (e.g. as injections or skin patches or as a gel applied to the skin or as pellets buried under the skin). The choice depends on individual needs. Your doctor at the clinic will prescribe hormones and the dose will be adjusted for you.

**It is dangerous to take hormones which are not prescribed by a doctor or at a dose higher than prescribed.**

***Can I stop taking hormones prescribed to me at any time and will this be harmful?***

Generally, stopping hormone medication will reverse the beneficial effects and side-effects and you can do so at any time without any harm to you. However, if you stop, the masculinising characteristics will gradually disappear, except the deeper voice, which is usually permanent. You may wish to seek advice from your doctor or the clinic before discontinuing the medication.

***Can I develop breast cancer?***

Yes. Both men and women can develop breast cancer, although it is much less common in men. If you decide to opt for bilateral mastectomy (surgical removal of both breasts), this will substantially reduce the risk of developing breast cancer. It is important that you discuss this with your doctor, who will look at your family medical history and the options available to you for screening for breast cancer. There are leaflets available at the clinic which contain advice about what to do and what to look for which you might find helpful.

***What is breast awareness?***

Breast awareness is becoming familiar with your breasts, what they look and feel like and being able to know what is normal for you. This will help you to be aware of any changes. Should these happen, you should report them right away. You should tell your doctor without delay if you experience any changes in the outline or shape of the breast, which is other than desired breast development, any discomfort or pain in the breast, any nipple discharge or change in the nipple position, or any lumps, thickening or bumpy areas. Please see the separate leaflet (G5) about breast awareness.

***What monitoring will take place?***

We will check various levels of hormones in your blood as well as other blood tests including liver function tests every 3-6 months whilst you are prescribed hormones. Routine blood pressure and weight checks will be carried out at each clinic visit. You will also be examined regularly by a clinic doctor or your GP to check on the progress and changes expected from the hormones.

***Where can I get further information?***

Please feel free to ask any of the staff in the Gender Clinic.