

TRANSGENDER PATIENTS – PRESCRIBING HORMONE THERAPY

The LMC is aware that more and more GP practices are being asked by the Gender Identity Clinics (GICs) and perhaps also private providers to prescribe hormone therapy for transgender patients.

The background to this is that gender reassignment services are commissioned by the Welsh Health Specialist Services Committee (WHSSC) and they have identified gaps in the commissioned services for Wales. A working party has been set up to resolve these issues, but this is expected to take some time.

In the meantime, we are left with a situation where GPs are increasingly being asked to prescribe hormone therapy which is usually off license and unfamiliar in general practice. The LMC view is that GPs should not be prescribing or treating in these specialized areas unless they are fully competent and confident. Part of the problem is that the GICs suggest that GPs are obliged to take on this work by virtue of the GMC statement which states that doctors must co-operate with the GICs and gender specialists to provide treatment for trans and non-binary people, including prescribing medicines recommended by a gender specialist for the treatment of gender dysphoria. This statement has been contested by the BMA, whose key concern is to ensure that GPs can prescribe safely within their limits of competence, and this includes the ability to decline to prescribe, where appropriate. The BMA has pointed out to the GMC that its guidance places inappropriate expectations on GPs, and undermines the GMC's own Good Medical Practice. The BMA is deeply concerned with the potential for GPs to feel coerced to prescribe specialist drugs.

The WHSSC specification for gender services states that Local Health Boards are responsible for providing hormone therapy through their endocrinology services. In Cwm Taf the endocrinology service is willing to accept referrals from GPs, but in Cardiff and Vale the endocrinology service has historically returned GP referrals. The relevant section of the service specification is attached for your information.

The LMC has pressed both Health Boards on this issue. The situation seems easier in Cwm Taf, as endocrinology has accepted some referrals. In Cardiff and Vale we have obtained the following update from the Medical Director:-

- Clear guidance is being sought from the Chief Medical Officer on the provision of hormone therapy as a primary or secondary care service.
- Cardiff and Vale endocrinology has now expressed an interest in providing a service and this will be developed as part of the local pathway.
- Local service proposals are being developed. The LMC will ensure that any GP involvement is entirely voluntary (eg involving a GP with a specialist interest/service level agreement).

WHSSC: SPECIALISED SERVICE POLICY: CP21 SPECIALISED ADULT GENDER IDENTITY SERVICES (ISSUE DATE 25 SEPTEMBER 2012):

3. Access Criteria

3.1 Clinical Indications and Criteria for Treatment

If the patient wishes to be referred to a provider out of the agreed pathway, an IPFR should be submitted.

The access criteria for assessment (at the West London Mental Health NHS Trust Gender Identity Clinic (GIC)), hormone therapy (at the West London Mental Health NHS Trust Gender Identity Clinic (GIC)), and gender confirmation surgery is set out below:

Assessment

The diagnosis of Gender Dysphoria in an adult requires four criteria to be met:

1. The desire to live and be accepted as a member of the opposite sex, usually accompanied by the wish to make his or her body as congruent as possible with the preferred sex through surgery and hormone treatment; and
2. The gender dysphoria has been present persistently for at least two years; and
3. The disorder is not a symptom of another mental disorder or chromosomal abnormality; and
4. The disorder causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning;

Hormone Therapy

Endocrinology services are planned and funded locally by the Local Health Boards, and would be responsible for the assessment, monitoring and provision of hormone therapy for patients with Gender Dysphoria. However, for patients residing in areas in Wales which do not offer endocrinology support, WHSSC plans and funds access to endocrinology support and assessments at WLMHT GIC where clinically indicated.

The WLMHT GIC will be responsible for ensuring that patients meet the criteria for hormone therapy prior to the recommendation of treatment.