A patient-centred approach to care supported by transgender affirmative clinicians will maximise a beneficial outcome for the gender dysphoric patient and his or her associates. A number of assessment interviews, often with members of a multidisciplinary team, are necessary to confirm the diagnosis and to exclude significant comorbid conditions that may affect progress. The role of the psychiatrist in supporting the patient with gender dysphoria is considered alongside more specific interventions such as psychotherapy and assessment for progression to hormone therapy and gender confirmation surgery.

Definitions of gender

- Sexual identity is defined as the sense of belonging to one sex or another.
- Gender identity is an individual's sense of being masculine or feminine.
- Gender role is the expression of gender identity by social constructs of dress, mannerism and behaviours.
- Sexual orientation refers to the preference for same sex, opposite sex, both sexes for sexual activity or a preference for no sex.
- Gender dysphoria is a person's profound sense and discomfit of the body phenotype.

Initial assessment and differential diagnosis; comorbid psychiatric conditions

- Considerable number of potential comorbid mental health problems which may challenge the assessment and entry into a gender transition programme of care. These include anxiety and depressive disorders, psychoses and substance misuse.
- The role of the psychiatrist includes confirmation of the clinical diagnosis, management of concurrent mental health issues, and optimising prognosis for a favourable outcome.

Epidemiology and prevalence

- The 1998 survey of people experiencing gender dysphoria was conducted in Scotland and estimated the prevalence to be 8 per 100,000 people aged over 15 years (Wilson et al, 1999).
- This had a male/female ratio of 4:1 with 1:12,700 for MTF (trans women) and 1:52,000 for FTM (trans men).

Professional standards of care

- Standards of care are set for the international community by a committee of the WPATH. National guidelines exist for children and adolescents in the UK. For adults, a draft document exists for UK-based clinicians.

Psychological support and psychotherapy

- Psychological support is a valuable part of the care for many patients undertaking the real life experience.
- Psychotherapy can explore a number of important factors which may need resolution for successful transitions.
- Therapy may be best offered by a colleague working as part of the gender team.
The role of the mental health professional

- With good pre-operative information, preparation for the new gender role and realistic expectations about what surgery can offer, most trans people will have a successful post-operative experiences.
- All patients should be offered a medical and psychological review to establish any ongoing needs (e.g. hormone prescriptions, psychotherapy) prior to discharge to the general practitioner.

Further reading


