

## **Does the clinic expect me to dress or act in a certain way e.g. if I identify as female will it help with the process of transition if I wear a dress?**

No, there are no rules or expectations from the service as to how you are expected to dress or to express your gender identity.

There are many different modes of dress and it is most important that you wear something that you are comfortable in.

## **Do I have to pay for my treatment at Brackenburn Clinic?**

The Gender Identity Service is run through the National Health Service (NHS) and it is free at the point of delivery if you are entitled to treatment.

As this is a high cost service, when you have been referred, you will be contacted by the Paying Patient and Overseas Service and asked to provide evidence of entitlement to treatment in Northern Ireland.

## **What if I would like to access private treatment? Are private referrals accepted for NHS surgery?**

If you wish to access private endocrinology, dermatology or surgery treatments you are welcome to do so. This will not affect your attendance at clinic, however, we are not in a position to become involved in making a referral to, or giving advice on any treatments that you arrange privately as they are being provided by another service.

Referrals for surgery within the NHS need to come from NHS providers. If you are attending a private therapist and want surgery within the NHS we recommend you discuss this with them directly.

## **I am currently taking hormones that I have bought myself. Will I be asked to stop them if I am referred to Brackenburn Clinic?**

The potential difficulty with buying hormones off the internet, for example, is that you can never be completely certain of what you are taking. Also, given hormones affect your fertility, you need to consider whether or not you would like to have sperm or egg storage as this is not usually possible while taking hormone replacement treatment.

We will not ask you to stop taking your hormones nor will this stop you accessing treatment at the clinic. However, we are not in a position to provide recommendations about dosage or monitoring as this treatment has not been organised by the clinic. It is up to you to negotiate with your General Practitioner about monitoring your health whilst taking them.

## **Can I be issued with a bridging prescription?**

The joint royal colleges guidelines for the treatment of Gender Dysphoria make reference to the consideration of 'bridging' prescriptions for people taking self-prescribed hormones because of the potential risk of harm from them (see above).

However, the General Medical Council's Good Medical Practice (2013) advises that all doctors "prescribe drugs or treatment, including repeat prescriptions, only when you have adequate knowledge of the patient's health and are satisfied that the drugs or treatment serve the patient's needs."

This generally requires a period of assessment which necessarily takes time and this is the standard that the Gender Identity Service currently works to with regards to the provision of bridging prescriptions.

### **I have a diagnosed mental health problem, will this prevent me from attending the clinic or having treatment?**

Having a diagnosed mental health problem including a diagnosed learning disability does not exclude you from having an assessment or treatment. However, we need your mental health to be stable for a period to allow us to carry out a detailed assessment.

This process can be stressful so it is important that you feel mentally well enough to engage with your therapist in order for you to get the most from your time in the clinic and so you can make fully informed decisions about your care. The same is true for making decisions around surgery and so you are in the best possible place when you have your operation.

Your mental health difficulties and how they affect you will be discussed during your initial assessment. You and your therapist may agree what should happen if you become unwell at any stage of your journey through the clinic. This may include liaising with your psychiatrist or key-worker, negotiating a break in your treatment or agreeing what you will do in a crisis.

You are welcome to have a nominated family member or friend attend appointments with you if you wish. If this is not possible we can organise an advocate for you [ref mental health care pathway document]

### **I have a chronic physical health problem, will this prevent me from attending the clinic or accessing treatment?**

Having a diagnosed chronic physical health problem does not exclude you from having an assessment or treatment. However, we need your physical health to be stable for a period to allow us to carry out a detailed assessment.

This process can be stressful so it is important that you feel well enough to engage with your therapist in order for you to get the most from your time in the clinic and so you can make fully informed decisions about your care. The same is true for making decisions around surgery and undergoing the operation itself.

For some people the nature of their health problem may mean that hormone treatment and / or surgery is not an option or that they require a different type of surgery. Decisions about your treatment will not be made without your input and are likely to include discussions with your treating doctor, the surgeon or endocrinologist and at times an opinion from an anaesthetist or a second opinion. We will endeavour to ensure you are provided with as much information as possible so you can make an informed decision about how you wish to proceed.

Your physical health difficulties and how they affect you will be discussed during your initial assessment. You and your therapist may agree what should happen if you become unwell at any stage of your time at the clinic. This may include liaising with the doctor who treats your illness or negotiating a break in your treatment.

### **I am having problems getting my doctor to refer me to Brackenburn Clinic so I can have an assessment and treatment for my gender dysphoria. What can I do?**

We recommend that you ask for a second opinion as gender incongruence and gender Dysphoria (previously called gender identity disorder) are internationally recognised medical conditions for which people are entitled to seek treatment.

## **How long will I need to wait for an appointment?**

As Brackenburn Clinic is an NHS service we endeavour to see people as soon as we can. This is not always possible and issues such as the number of referrals we receive, funding and staffing levels impact on these times.

We understand that waiting often increases people's distress. Once your name has been added to our assessment waiting list you will be sent a letter which includes advice on sources of support which you may wish to access while you wait. You can contact the clinic either by telephone or email to make specific enquiries about where you are on the waiting list.

## **Why do I have to do the Real Life Experience (RLE)?**

The RLE is the period of time when a person lives full time in their preferred gender role *whilst attending a recognised gender service*. This means that they present in that gender to all of their family and friends and at their place of occupation whether a university or the workplace.

It includes, for example, using appropriate toilet facilities and changing documentation, such as payslips, to reflect their preferred name. The literature, national and international guidelines, as well as our own clinical experience, are clear that people who have had the experience of living for a period, full time, in their preferred gender role have fewer regrets after treatment.

The RLE serves a clinical purpose as its start marks the beginning of the countdown to sex reassignment surgery (SRS) and for most people it is successfully completed after a year. For those who do not wish to undergo SRS an RLE is not necessary.

## **Can I claim travel expenses?**

You are entitled to claim travel expenses if you are in receipt of particular benefits. Travel claim forms are available at reception and have to be signed by a member of staff. You will need to enclose evidence of your entitlement to benefits with your first claim form.

We also have links with an independent advisor from the voluntary sector who is available to help people understand their benefit entitlements. If you would like more information about these issues please speak to your therapist.

## **I am having problems with my therapist, what can I do about this? I would like to ask for a change of therapist, how do I go about this?**

If you are having a problem with your therapist it is often helpful to try and speak to them directly in the first instance as this may be sufficient to address your concerns. However, we recognise that it is not always easy to do this or you may prefer not to.

If this is the case we recommend that you put your concerns in writing in either a letter or email so the team can discuss how we might best resolve the issue. The trust also has a formal complaints procedure and you will be given advice about how to access this at your first appointment.

## **Can you give me a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC)?**

The Gender Identity Clinic cannot issue you with a Gender Recognition Certificate. You must apply for this to the Gender Recognition Panel (which is a UK governmental tribunal) if you want your acquired gender to be legally recognised in the UK.

There are 3 different ways ('routes') to get a certificate - which one you use depends on your situation.

More details can be obtained from their website - [www.gov.uk/apply-gender-recognition-certificate/overview](http://www.gov.uk/apply-gender-recognition-certificate/overview)

### **When can I be considered for chest reconstruction?**

In most cases patients are considered for chest reconstruction when they have consolidated their social and psychological transition to their chosen gender role over a period of twelve months whilst taking cross-sex hormones. However, if the patient can demonstrate significant difficulty living in the chosen gender role because they have not had chest reconstruction, in appropriate circumstances, this form of surgery can be considered after 1 year's attendance at the clinic whether or not they have begun to live in role or started cross-sex hormone treatment.

### **I identify as gender non-binary, can I be assessed and treated at Brackenburn Clinic?**

The gender identity service provides assessment and treatment for people who suffer from gender Dysphoria and this includes people identifying as gender non-binary as well as those who are transgender.

### **What if I don't want to have hormones? What if I don't want to have surgery?**

There is no expectation that you have any particular treatment or combination of treatments. The aim of the service is to provide you with the treatment that you want as safely as possible. There is also no requirement that you have all your treatments at once within the clinic.

For example, it is not unusual for people to take some time between surgeries. If this is the case you and your therapist may agree that you will be discharged, with a view to your re-referral to the service being fast-tracked, whenever you are ready to proceed.

### **I socially transitioned a few years ago, will you take this into account?**

It is our practice to acknowledge time spent living in your preferred gender role before you attend the service. We ask that people provide evidence to support this including documentary evidence of name change; for example household bills, payslips or letters with their preferred name, as well as a collateral history from someone close to them.

### **If I express a doubt about my gender, transition or treatment what will happen?**

Transitioning is often a major change for a person and generally affects all aspects of their life so it would be very unusual not to have any doubts. Your therapist is there to help you to think about the decisions you're making and to provide you with all the information you need so you can make informed choices about your care.

Expressing a doubt does not automatically mean that you will be prevented from moving forward with your transition though it may mean that you need more time or information so you can feel more certain before you proceed. Generally being able to discuss reservations, worries or doubts is something that we would expect to form part of your working relationship with your therapist.

### **I have been referred to Brackenburn Clinic from KOI ( Knowing our Identity Service / Gender Identity Development Service) will you take into account the work I have done with them?**

We do acknowledge time spent in your preferred gender role and work done whilst with KOI. How this looks depends on how far along you are in your transition process. There is still an expectation that you will complete an assessment within Brackenburn Clinic, which is likely to include particular pieces of work, as this is a necessary part of getting to know you.

If you have started on cross-sex hormone treatment within KOI work within the adult service is likely to focus on helping you think about and prepare for surgery. It may be helpful to know that the main guidelines followed by the adult clinic is the joint royal colleges guidelines for the treatment of gender Dysphoria while in KOI it is the Tavistock Guidelines and there are some key differences between these documents.

### **Is there anything that might delay my surgery after I have been referred by Brackenburn Clinic?**

In order for us to recommend you for surgery you need to be in reasonable physical and mental health. For transwomen, sex reassignment surgery can be delayed if you are overweight (as a general rule if you have a Body Mass Index (BMI) of over 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup>) or underweight. Some women need to have genital hair removal depending on the surgical technique to be used.

This decision can only be made by the surgeon at the time of your pre-operation assessment. Use of certain illicit drugs such as cannabis can interfere with the effectiveness of pain relief and drug or alcohol withdrawal can impact on your ability to lie flat in the days after your surgery.

For transmen, it is generally accepted that being established on cross-sex hormone treatment results in a better cosmetic outcome for reconstructive chest surgery. If you are a smoker this will delay sex reassignment surgery as smoking affects the small blood vessels that will supply blood to your new penis and this can lead to the surgery being unsuccessful.

If you have particular physical or mental health problems these may also impact on your ability to tolerate surgery and the recover period.

## **Journey through the clinic**

Everyone's journey through the clinic is unique to them and their individual circumstances which can make it hard to provide absolutes with regards to timescales. It is also difficult because situations can arise in the course of someone's treatment that can not be predicted. However, below is a flow chart which maps out the general journey through the clinic.

You will see that there are a number of other services that Brackenburn Clinic refers to including Dermatology (for laser hair removal), endocrinology (for treatment with cross sex hormones) and surgical services in England. Each of these services is operated independently of the clinic and, as such, we have no control over how they manage their referrals.

Generally, waiting lists within the health service are increasing and each of the services named have their own waiting times which in turn can slow down your journey through the clinic. Once you have been referred to one of these services you will be provided with the contact details for them which will allow you to liaise with them directly, about waiting times, should you chose.

As you may be aware the management of gender dysphoria is evolving and because of this the chart below is regularly reviewed and updated by the team and is likely to change as time goes on.

At present the following treatments are funded within Northern Ireland:

- Wig fitting
- Speech and Language Therapy
- Dermatology
- Endocrinology
- Egg and sperm storage
- Surgeries including sex reassignment surgery, reconstructive chest surgery, facial feminisation surgery including tracheal shave and breast augmentation.

All surgeries are paid for by the NHS but carried out privately in England.