Determining a Client’s Readiness for Gender Transition: Clinical Evaluation and Recommendation

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Session Overview

- Identify DSM 5 diagnostic criteria for gender dysphoria
- Describe social and medical gender transition including its criteria and assessment
- Discuss practical strategies that counselors can best assess and recommend candidates for social and medical gender transition
Gender Dysphoria in DSM-5

A condition in which one experiences a marked incongruence between one’s expressed and assigned gender for at least six months

- In children
- In adults and adolescents

Must be accompanied with clinically significant distress or impairment in important areas of functioning
Clinical Interview and Observation

• Acknowledges struggles/challenges
• Observes significant behaviors
• Assesses the environment
• Rules out differential diagnosis
• Identifies other/related mental health concerns
Gender Transition

A period in which a person expresses oneself as and adopts gender role of an desired gender

- Psychological
- Social
- Hormonal
- Surgical
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<tr>
<th>Type</th>
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| Psychological      | Dealing with internal identify; Preparing for coming out | • Clear, attainable, realistic expectations  
• Co-existing mental health concerns | • Gathering information  
• Seeking professional assistance |
| Social Transition  | Coming out                                          | • Gradual transition  
• Abrupt transition  
• Profound impacts | • Coming out to families/friends  
• Changing legal documents |
| Hormonal Transition| Seeking Hormone Therapy                             | • Reversible interventions  
• Partially reversible interventions  
• Health risks | • Receiving GnRH-a  
• Taking testosterone/estrogen |
| Surgical Transition| Pursing reconstruction surgery(ies)                 | • Irreversible interventions                                 | • Breast augmentation  
• Genital reconstruction |
Transition as Developmental Process

- is a life long process
- enables people to experience identity shifts
- is a period where people find their place
- has a different starting or ending point for everyone
- may cycle and recycle
Current Care: Provider

- Binary assumption to care
- Focus is on pathology, not diversity
- Unnecessary barriers to care
- Excessive waits to get treatment
- Limited evidence behind diagnostic criteria and treatment options
- Limited knowledge and skills in trans care
Current Care: Consumer

• Lack of access to competent care
• Face discrimination and institutional oppression
• Avoid seeking professional help
• Learn to work around the criteria and providers
• Access to less/unhelpful resources
Bridging the Gap: Gatekeeping to Informed Consent Evaluation Approach
Informed Consent Approach: Guiding Principles

- Embrace complexity and tolerate uncertainty
- Convey respect, empathy, and compassion
- Avoid reducing clients to gender, physical attributes, or to the intervention they are seeking
- Remember clients are experts in their own lives, but may not know what they need and what options are
Recommending Candidates for Gender Transition
Questions to Ponder

• Is this person likely to benefit from social, hormonal, and surgical transition?

• Are they prepared, have realistic expectations, and have the practical and emotional support they need to achieve a positive transition outcome or will it decrease the quality of their life?

• Do they have a general idea of their transition plan and resources they would need?
Counseling and Support for Changes in Gender Role

• Clarifying and exploring gender identity and role
• Addressing the impact of stigma and minority stress on one’s mental health and human development, and
• Facilitating a coming-out process

(p. 184, Coleman et al., 2011)

Referral Letter

• The client’s general identifying characteristics;
• Results of the client’s psychosocial assessment, including any diagnoses;
• The duration of the referring health professional’s relationship with the client;
• An explanation that the criteria for hormone therapy have been met, and a brief description of the clinical rationale for supporting the client’s request for hormone therapy;
• A statement that informed consent has been obtained from the patient;
• A statement that the referring health professional is available for coordination of care and welcomes a phone call to establish this.
Key Points

• Recognize our own understanding, biases, and assumptions regarding gender, gender identity, and sexuality

• Understand that gender transition is a complex process which presents opportunities and challenges

• Conceptualize client concerns in the context of individual’s psychological, relational, cultural, and physical aspects

• Assist clients in developing realistic expectations on transition

• Seek opportunities for interprofessional collaboration
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