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Alberta's care for transgender kids a 'broken system,' say doctors
Physicians call for immediate funding to halt long waits for transgender care for kids
By Heather Lee, CBC - Canada.ca, 04/19/2016 11:00 AM EDT. Last updated on 04/19/2016 at 11:00 AM EDT.

Transgender patients face health-care discrimination, inadequate treatment
Health experts from around the world gather in Amsterdam for transgender summit
By Heather Lee, CBC - Canada.ca, 04/19/2016 11:00 AM EDT. Last updated on 04/19/2016 at 11:00 AM EDT.

Alberta to study transgender surgery barriers before tackling years-long waitlists
"The first time my chest is revealed to me, I think I might cry," says one Albertan waiting for "top surgery"
By Heather Lee - Rubicon Fletcher • CBC News
April 19, 2016

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Why me?

- Responsibility as an ethicist to ask:
 - What do we owe each other, how can we live up to this?
 - What do we value as an organization or society? What kind of organization or society do we want to be? Are we achieving this?
- As someone who is privileged to speak in front of others:
 - To consider how to responsibly make use of these platforms to promote discussion on important topics
- As a front-line care provider:
 - To continually try to uncover what I don't know, what I ought to know, and to work to know better and do better with all people I encounter

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Waypoints

- Case
- Terminology
- Context
- Ethics
- What to do
- Resources

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Case (adapted from Zunner 2012)

Tara is a 35 year old patient who was admitted to a medicine unit following a ruptured appendix which occurred while Tara was coaching her daughter's baseball game. She had an urgent appendectomy late last night and is now recovering. Tara is distressed, not only because of her unexpected medical condition, but also because she was planning to travel to Vancouver later this week to participate in a triathlon with her husband.

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Case (adapted from Zunner 2012)

Tara has type 2 Diabetes, and is a male-to female transgender person. She hasn't yet had gender-reassignment surgery but is considering it in the next couple of years. She started estrogen therapy two years ago, and initially sought the help of a physician, but has since resorted to buying her hormones on the internet, as it has been difficult to find a physician who work with her on her hormone regimen.

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Case (adapted from Zunner 2012)

Ayodele is a medical student, starting his second week on the unit where Tara is staying. Earlier that morning he was speaking with a nurse about the patients. In reference to Tara, she "warned" Ayodele, that Tara is "rude" and doesn't listen. "He's kind of a strange one", she says. "His cross-dressing is purely attention-seeking behaviour."

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Case (adapted from Zunner 2012)

One rounds, the team gathers outside Tara's room. The attending physician, Dr. Bennett, announces quite loudly, "this is a 35 year old male, one day post-appendectomy, with type-2 diabetes. His surgical site is clean and looks to be healing well." He adds, "Oh, and *he* prefers the name Tara." Ayodele is surprised at the comments as Dr. Bennett is normally very respectful of her patients.

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Terminology

- **Sex:** refers to biologic sex assigned at birth. Includes male, female or intersex, and is determined by genetics and reproductive organs
- **Gender Identity:** one's internal sense of one's own gender based on understandings of masculine, feminine, and other traits
- **Gender Expression:** one's external presentation of gender, expressed through one's name, preferred pronouns, attire, hair style, voice, behaviours, or bodily characteristics

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Terminology

- **Transgender:** umbrella term which refers to people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what is associated with their sex assigned at birth
- **Sexual Orientation:** refers to who one is physically, emotionally, and spiritually attracted to, based on their sex/gender, in relation to one's own
- **Transition(ing):** process of changing one's gender presentation. This can include changes in name/pronouns, expression (clothes, mannerisms, etc.), and/or physiology (through use of hormones or surgery)

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Social Context (Bauer 2015b)

- 13% have been fired for being trans (addnt 15% fired, but were unsure why)
- Though 44% of trans people have a post secondary and/or graduate degree, the median income reported in a 2011 study (Bauer 2012) is \$15,000/year.
- 20% have been physically or sexually assaulted for being trans; 34% have been verbally threatened or harassed but not assaulted

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Social Context (Bauer 2015b)

- ~60% have avoided public spaces for fear of harassment, being perceived as trans, or being “outed”; 57% have avoided public washrooms due to safety concerns
- > 50% have depressive symptoms consistent with clinical depression, 43% of trans people have a history of attempting suicide, 10% within the past year

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Experiences in Health Care – the Stats (Bauer 2015b)

- 10% of trans emergency room patients reported having care stopped or denied because they were trans
- 25% reported being belittled or ridiculed by an emergency care provider for being trans
- 20% have avoided the ED when they needed it

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Cumulative Effects

- Threats to mental health
- Threats to physical health
- Decreased participation in society

These are of particular concern, and may be accentuated for trans people who also experience discrimination for other reasons, including race, disability status etc.

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Engagement with health care

- As a person seeking medical assistance with psychological or physical aspects of transition. In this context, trans people are well people
- As a person seeking regular care for the parts of the body they have – this may include attention for parts of physiology that stem from assigned sex, rather than gender. (e.g. a trans man who has a cervix)
- As a person seeking care unrelated to sex or gender

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Access to Resources in Alberta

- 3 psychiatrists in AB who can assess people seeking funded care for transitions
- Psychiatric involvement necessary to affirm eligibility
- 35 funded surgeries/year
- Wait lists
- Adults and children/youth


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Ethics – Respect for Persons 

- About recognizing the legitimate agency in others
- Responding to the patient’s authority to determine their own gender identify and gender expression
- Respect the patient’s journey and needs. Never dismiss the patient as being “difficult” or “attention seeking”
- Respect the medical needs you are presented with. Distinguish between circumstances where patient’s sex/gender is relevant and when it is not

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Ethics – Minimizing Harm 


- About our duties to identify and minimize exposure to physical and psychosocial harms for our patients
- Expands to obligations to understand what constitutes harm from the patient’s perspective; we do not get to decide whether patients are being harmed, they do.
- Do not dismiss things you think are “small” or “no big deal” that the patient sees as significant. Recognize the cumulative effect of such experiences for the patient.
- Respond to the connection between stigma and marginalization, and mental health issues, including depression and suicidality
- Respond to the physical person in front of you.

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Ethics – Privacy and Confidentiality 

- Closely related to Respect for Persons, this is about recognizing the individual role in determining whether and how to share personal information
- Only seek the information you need to know of your patients. Explain why more information may be required.
- Respond to the sensitivity of patient information. It is crucial not to expose or “out” patients.

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To Sum

- Transgender people have faced significant marginalization and stigma, perpetuated by our health system
- Trans people are people. Trans ethics are people ethics
- While are ethical obligations are the same to all, we have further obligation to understand the meaning and impacts of these values for trans patients

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Thanks



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