



West Coast District Health Board

Te Poari Hauora a Rohe o Tai Poutini

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1 October 2020

9(2)(a)

RE Official information request WCDHB 9472

I refer to your email dated 10 September 2020 requesting the following information under the Official Information Act from West Coast DHB. Specifically:

1. *Of the following list of services, which (if any) does the District Health Board provide? Does the DHB provide any services for transgender health care not listed, if so, what?*

- ***Puberty blockers***
- ***Hormone replacement therapy***
- ***Fertility preservation***
- ***Mastectomy***
- ***Hysterectomy***
- ***Orchiectomy***
- ***Facial hair removal***
- ***Breast augmentation***
- ***Voice training***
- ***Facial feminization surgery***
- ***Genital reconstruction surgery***
- ***Counselling***
- ***Other mental health support (please specify services in response)***

West Coast DHB locally delivered services include provision of hormone replacement therapy, hysterectomy, orchiectomy, voice training (through speech language therapists) and mental health counselling. These services are all generic services available to our population, not specifically dedicated or related to transgender health care alone. They do, however, have pathways to help support transgender health care. Our speech therapy service does have a very small number of people for whom they work with to provide voice training services in respect of their transgender health care support. Our local mental health services are generic and not specifically tailored to transgender services. The services that they do provide, however, recognise higher rates of depression, insecurity and anxiety experienced among people who need mental health counselling and support relating to transgender issues; as well as help for those who adopt secondary maladjusted coping strategies such as drug and alcohol addictions.

Individuals who seek more specialised transgender related or gender reassignment related health care services from among the list of services outlined above are generally referred primarily to Canterbury DHB, but in some cases also to Auckland DHB. Services provided for West Coast residents in these tertiary health care centres are funded by the West Coast DHB as part of wider inter-district flow and tertiary services funding.

For services provided by the DHB:

2. What is their current status? What clinic (or clinics) provides the service? Are they accepting new patients?

Those services identified above are provided through urology and gynaecology (both outpatient and inpatient services); allied health speech language therapy (outpatient and community services); mental health services (adult crisis inpatient services, as well as acute response and planned counselling outpatient and community care services for children, youth and adult clients, including substance abuse services); and in primary care (mild- to moderate- brief intervention counselling through General Practice, in addition to the usual range of GP services). All services are accepting patients. As noted above, these are generic services, but have pathways to help support transgender health care.

3. Broken down by provided services (and initial consultation and readiness assessments or other if applicable), how long is the current wait time on appointments for transgender health? How long have these wait times been in previous years that the service was available?

West Coast DHB does not hold a central record of this information you have requested; the only such information that may be recorded being that held in individual clinical case notes and patient records as may be pertinent to any individual patient concerned. We therefore decline to provide additional information that may or may not be held if we undertook manual research of each of individual patients' case notes under Section 18 (f) of the Official Information Act i.e. "... that the information requested cannot be made available without substantial collation or research."

4. What set(s) of transgender health guidelines are used to inform practice?

West Coast DHB has a series of clinical and referral guidelines outlined electronically on our West Coast Healthpathways system, that includes a suite of pathways about transgender health. Access to this system is limited to health professionals working within the West Coast Health System. The information in these pathway supports clinicians to prescribe, refer and monitor gender-affirming health requests and treatment for children, youth and adults according to agreed ways of working in the West Coast and Canterbury DHBs.

Additionally, HealthInfo for Te Tai Poutini has a set of pages about gender identity (*ira tangata tuakiri*): <https://www.healthinfo.org.nz/WestCoast/index.htm?gender-identity.htm> although the support networks and guideline links on this page mainly refers to services provided by organisations based off the West Coast.

5. What requirements are there for patients accessing care? (Eg. Readiness assessment)

West Coast DHB follows the same pathway requirements as Canterbury DHB for accessing transgender health care services. Canterbury DHB use the Oliphant (2018) Guidelines for gender affirming health care, and these have been used to inform the clinical Healthpathways relating to transgender health care services of both DHBs. The World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) guidelines are also taken into account as part of this pathway development.

Readiness assessments are covered within these guidelines, with assessments being undertaken by an appropriate psychologist or psychiatrist with experience in gender dysphoria before referral can be made to secondary care services in Canterbury DHB.

6. For HRT specifically, what is the standard practice regarding choice of medication and dosages? Are GPs expected to be able to provide HRT, and if so what support are they given to ensure quality of care? What measures are in place to ensure that all patients are fully informed of all medications that could meet their HRT needs besides the suggested treatment plan?

West Coast HealthPathways has a page on “Gender-affirming Hormones” as part of a suite of community pathways about transgender health. As noted above, access to Healthpathways is limited to health professionals working within the West Coast Health System; this includes local GPs. Community HealthPathways is a dynamic, continually updated, consensus guideline with information aimed at General Practice. The information in this pathway supports GPs to prescribe and monitor treatment with gender-affirming hormone treatment according to the agreed ways of working in the West Coast and Canterbury DHBs.

Additionally, HealthInfo for Te Tai Poutini has a set of pages about gender identity (*ira tangata tuakiri*): <https://www.healthinfo.org.nz/WestCoast/index.htm?gender-identity.htm> although the support networks and guideline links on this page mainly refers to services provided by organisations based off the West Coast.

7. Does the DHB have a Transgender Health Key Worker (or similar)?

No.

8. Are there any youth-specific service providers? How would an underage person access trans-specific healthcare in the DHB?

West Coast DHB provides paediatric inpatient and outpatient services, as well as child and adolescent outpatient and community mental health services; however, none are dedicated to being transgender specific. Healthpathways guidelines for clinicians are in place for underage persons who present for transgender health care, with referral to tertiary services in Canterbury DHB to access early interventions during pre-puberty and early puberty, as timeliness is particularly important for long-term physical and mental health outcomes.

9. When were the available services first offered?

As above – West Coast DHB provides generic assessment and counselling services within our local district in this regard, with specific referral to service elsewhere for those individual patient where more specialised care relating to transgender health care issues, and/or where services related to gender reassignment may be sought or provided.

10. Have these services ever been unavailable, and if so, between what dates?

No – not since they were respectively commenced within our DHB.

For the services that are not provided by the DHB:

11. Are patients referred elsewhere for these services? If so, where are they referred to?

As above, individuals who seek more specialised transgender-related health care from among the list of services outlined above are generally primarily referred to Canterbury DHB; and on occasion to Auckland DHB.

12. Were any of these services ever previously provided by the DHB?

No.

Regardless of transgender health service status:

13. Is there any additional support made for healthcare needs that are not particular to transgender health but are particular areas of interest for transgender health? Eg. Substance use, mental health care.

As noted above in the answer to question 1, West Coast DHB's local mental health services are generic and not specifically tailored to transgender services. The services that they do provide, however, recognise higher rates of depression, insecurity and anxiety experienced among people who need mental health counselling and support relating to transgender issues; as well as help for those who adopt secondary maladjusted coping strategies such as drug and alcohol addictions.

14. What plans are there, if any, to expand or improve care for transgender patients within the DHB?

Given our relatively small population and scale of local services, there are no current specific plans to expand the range of care that is currently provided for transgender patients within the West Coast DHB, other than linking in developments to those supports and services that are provided to our resident population by Canterbury DHB.

15. Have there been any internal reviews of the care provided or outcomes for transgender patients? If so, what were the results of those reviews, and what action was taken based on them?

West Coast DHB has undertaken one internal review arising from a complaint relating to transgender health. As a result, our website was updated with a Gender Affirmation Healthcare section with all the links to external websites regarding process for transitioning. This case is also identified in the answer to question 17 below.

16. What measures does the DHB currently have in place to educate healthcare workers not working in transgender health areas on the needs of transgender patients they may encounter? How is their right to be treated with dignity upheld?

There is currently no specific formal training on transgender health issues in place to educate health care workers who are otherwise not engaged in working in transgender health areas.

Our inpatient wards have onsite a Cultural Needs resource folder with information regarding caring for transgender patients, along with other cultures, and for all intents and purpose all patient dignity should be respected. Clinical staff in all fields and working environments are professionals and as such, are expected to deal with clients from all walks of life with the respect and dignity that they deserve; both at a personal level and as a reflection of our DHB's ethos of putting patients first. For patients who feel they may not have been treated appropriately and their rights to being treated with dignity have not been upheld, the West Coast DHB has a complaints policy and procedure in place through which patients and their family/whanau can make complaints and seek redress. These may be made in person, in writing, or made electronically on line through our public website at the following link:

<https://www.wcdhb.health.nz/about-us/contact-us/contact-form/?FeedbackType=complaint>

Patients and their family/whanau also have the right to complain about services that they receive through the Health and Disability Commission.

17. Have any actions been taken based on complaints by transgender patients? If so, what actions have been made in response to complaints?

West Coast DHB has had two complaints relating to transgender health. As a result of one of them, our website was updated with a Gender Affirmation Healthcare section with all the links to external websites regarding process for transitioning. This case is also identified in the answer to question 15 above.

I trust this satisfies your interest in this matter.

Please note that this response, or an edited version of this response, may be published on the West Coast DHB website after your receipt of this response.

Yours sincerely



Ralph La Salle
Acting Executive Director
Planning, Funding & Decision Support