

# SEX CHANGE SURGERY

## FACTS AND MYTHS



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Transsexualism is an individual's identification with a gender inconsistent or not culturally associated with his or her assigned sex. Simply put, it defines a person whose assigned sex at birth conflicts with his or her psychological gender. Transsexuals are normal biological males or females who believe that they are members of their opposite sex in the wrong body. A medical diagnosis can be made if a person experiences discomfort as a result of a desire to be a member of the opposite sex, or if a person experiences impaired functioning or distress as a result of that gender identification. Every body has a gender identity. However, because most people's gender identity is consistent with the sex ascribed to them at birth, they never think about it. Transgenders face serious discrimination in our society, in areas ranging from appropriate medical care to parental rights; from personal identification documents to the freedom to marry. And perhaps most common, transgender people face harassment and discrimination in the areas of employment, housing, and public accommodations – mistreatment that threatens their freedom to work and live safely in their own communities.

**Difference between "Sex" and "Gender"** needs to be clarified. While 'sex' represents physical differentiation as male or female, indicated by the external appearance of genitalia, 'gender' is the psychological recognition of self, and wish to be regarded by others, as fitting into the social categories such as boy/man or girl/woman. Gender is genetically hardwired into brain during intrauterine life and hence is not subject to reassignment. It can at best be affirmed by bringing the external appearance (sex) of the person to become congruent with his/her gender. Hence, what commonly called as Sex change surgery is actually not the changing of one's sex, it is rather affirming one's gender and hence Gender

Affirmation surgery, is the appropriate term.

The only relief for transsexuals is to bring their bodies into alignment with their psychological sex. This is done by 'sex-change' surgery and hormonal treatment. Sex change is something, which has not yet received a public eye. After surgery the transsexual takes on the appearance of his/her opposite sex. The surgery, which has a high danger ratio, is irreversible. Doctors including Psychiatrists, Plastic surgeons, Endocrinologists, Lawyers, Gynecologists and others from various fields have already spent acres of ink on the medical consequences and effects of such operation.

In our country wherein majority of the population is of rural background, the people are still unaware of the fact that Gender Affirmation surgery is possible. There is no competent legislation concerning the rights and liabilities of the transsexuals in India. Gender Affirmation is such type of technical advancement which has posed challenges to the present law and created legal difficulties.

Fortis Superspeciality Hospital, Shalimar Bagh, New Delhi has recruited myself and Dr Richie Gupta on Board w.e.f. from June 2013. Dr Richie and myself have formed a full team with Psychiatrists, Endocrinologists, Lawyers, Gynecologists and Gastro Intestinal surgeons to deal with transgender cases. The Psychiatrists first evaluates the case and give psychiatric clearance. Then an affidavit is being made with simultaneous consultations with other specialities as required.

For male to female transsexuals



selected for surgery, procedures may include genital reconstruction (vaginoplasty:- with colon or Penile inversion), breast augmentation and cosmetic surgery (facial reshaping, rhinoplasty, abdominoplasty, laryngeal shaving, vocal cord shortening, hair transplants). For female to male transsexuals, surgical procedures may include genital reconstruction (phalloplasty, genitoplasty, hysterectomy, bilateral oophorectomy), mastectomy, chest wall contouring and cosmetic surgery.

The cost of surgery for female to male for penile reconstruction is roughly two and a half to three lacs and for male to female for vaginal reconstruction is one and half to two lacs.

A vital part of the long-term diagnostic therapy is the so-called real-life experience, in which the patient lives as a member of the desired sex continually and in all social spheres in order to accumulate necessary experience. A specialist psychiatric care and a prolonged period of observation is used to identify the relatively rare "true" transsexual from the more common "secondary" transsexual. Hence, treatment should concentrate on the psychological adjustment, with hormone therapy and gender affirmation surgery being viewed as confirmatory procedures dependent on adequate psychological adjustment.

Psychiatric care may need to be continued even after gender affirmation surgery. The overall success of treatment depends only partly on the technical success of the surgery, but more crucially on the psychological adjustment of the transsexual, and the support from family, friends, employers and the medical profession.

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