

**Fenway Community Health
Transgender Health Program**

**Protocol for Hormone Therapy
September 2007**

General Philosophy

The mission of the Transgender Health Program of Fenway Community Health is to provide transgender people with competent and comprehensive care in a comfortable, safe, and respectful environment. Fenway Community Health is a community health center providing primary care, mental health and addictions services as well as acupuncture, massage, nutrition counseling and chiropractic care. We provide hormone treatment to transgender patients as a part of their overall primary care. We seek to provide excellent treatment that is client-centered and balances patients' health needs within a harm reduction philosophy.

The Transgender Health Program utilizes a multidisciplinary team of primary care providers and mental health clinicians to oversee the care of each Fenway client. We do not ascribe to or support any particular way that one needs to understand or express one's gender identity. Fenway is interested in assisting clients with their own personal explorations of gender and the consequent decisions they make relating to individual gender identity and expression. We collaborate with clients to create individualized treatment plans that are responsive to the particular needs and presenting concerns of each person and that provide responsible and competent health care within the larger medical and mental health communities' standards.

Hormone treatment often plays a vital role in the treatment of individuals with gender dysphoria and gender identity disorders. Fenway recognizes that people in transition, when denied access to safe and affordable options, may use whatever resources are available and may place themselves at great risk for infectious diseases and other avoidable harm. Significant medical and psychological effects of hormone treatment may be irreversible and serious or life threatening complications may occur in addition to the desired effects. Fenway providers advocate providing clients with information about the known risks and benefits of hormone treatment, including referrals to resources as needed, as well as providing a complete medical and mental health evaluation in a way that will support each person's ability to make informed healthcare decisions that are best for them.

The Protocol for Hormone Therapy was developed by Fenway in consultation with other medical and mental health professionals who have demonstrated expertise and experience working with transgender people. The Protocol has been informed by the Standards of Care and guidelines of the World Professional Association for Transgender Health, Inc. (f.k.a. The Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association), as well as those of other health care facilities that specialize in transgender health and mental health care within the United States. This protocol reflects current knowledge and research available within the medical and mental health literature and the collective experience of providers available to Fenway Community Health. The general fund of knowledge having to do with transgender health care and needs is continuously changing. Currently the FDA has not approved any medication for gender alteration. Given this reality, this protocol must be considered a dynamic document that will continue to be updated and revised as necessary and as more knowledge and research becomes available.

General Requirements

- Candidates must be at least 18 years of age and able to give informed consent.
- Candidates are required to undergo an evaluation for hormone treatment with a duly licensed mental health professional that specifically addresses the client's gender identity development and role expression through life, including past transition attempts or experience(s). The duration of the mental health evaluation will be determined by the mental health professional in cooperation with the client and in consultation with the Transgender Health Program clinical team. [In the case of clients who present to primary care already established on hormones through other means, exceptions to the mental health evaluation requirement will be made on a case-by-case basis and only in consultation with the Medical Director and the multidisciplinary clinical team.]
- Candidates for hormone therapy will have a case/treatment plan review with the Transgender Health Program multidisciplinary clinical team before hormone treatment is approved for hormone naïve clients or continued for hormone established clients.
- Candidates may be required to sign a release of information for all current and previous medical, mental health, and substance abuse records as deemed appropriate and necessary for safe and effective care or may be required to re-establish a record of treatment and care within Fenway before continuing to hormone therapy.
- Candidates will be counseled on cross-sex hormone therapy related to reproductive issues and will be required to sign consent forms indicating their understanding of their options regarding rights, options, risks, and effects as a result of hormone treatment.
- Candidates are required to have the means to finance their medications and supplies prior to starting, and to continue, hormone treatment. Hormone treatment and other medical and mental health services may not be covered by individual health insurance plans. It is the responsibility of clients to contact their insurance carriers to determine what is covered under individual policies. For services and supplies not covered by insurance, candidates must arrange a payment plan with Fenway.

Mental Health Requirements

Candidates for hormone treatment will have a mental health evaluation specific to gender identity development and role expression across the person's lifespan. The length of time of any particular evaluation will be determined by the evaluating clinician in consultation with the individual and the Transgender Health Program's clinical team. If the candidate's mental health treatment takes place outside of Fenway, the candidate may have the outside clinician write a letter of referral and recommendation for hormone therapy that adequately addresses all aspects of the complete hormone evaluation as outlined below. All internal or external letters, or hormone evaluations, will be reviewed by the Transgender Health Program multidisciplinary clinical team for approval to proceed to medical clearance for hormone therapy. A complete evaluation for hormone treatment will include the following:

1. Evaluator's recommendation
2. Length of time of treatment/evaluation and focus of treatment/evaluation
3. Complete gender identity developmental history including sexuality and relationships
4. Co-morbid diagnoses or concerns affecting gender identity development and expression
5. Complete mental health history including current symptoms, diagnoses, treatments, medications, and risk assessment as well as past treatments, including hospitalizations.
6. Complete substance use/abuse history including current use/abuse and history of treatment
7. Assessment of social and familial supports and relevant history

8. Assessment of candidate's understanding of the risks and benefits of hormone treatment
 - Clients with psychiatric diagnoses will be treated for the disorder(s) in accordance with commonly accepted professional standards. Treatment of co-morbid disorders may require delaying the recommendation for, or initiation of, hormone treatment until the individual's symptoms are deemed to be stable and the individual competent to make an informed decision about hormone treatment.
 - Candidates with active substance abuse will, in consultation with candidate's clinician and the Transgender Health Program's multidisciplinary clinical team, develop a treatment plan to reduce or eliminate substance use including tobacco use. In some cases, hormone treatment may be delayed until the candidate has shown progress in addressing substance abuse problems.
 - Candidates presenting for hormone therapy who have begun hormone treatment with another licensed medical facility or outside medical provider may not be required to have a mental health evaluation. Candidates must bring, or provide access to obtaining, medical records documenting prior hormone treatment. If a candidate has already begun hormone treatment, but is not able to provide previous medical documentation, a mental health and full medical evaluation will be required. The length of the mental health evaluation will be determined on an individual basis through consultation between the candidate, medical provider, evaluating clinician, and the Transgender Health Program's clinical team.

The full effects of life changes due to physical transition are often underestimated at the beginning of hormone treatment. It is strongly recommended that clients who begin hormone treatment continue mental health treatment during transition to adjust to the significant changes in the *initial* transitional period, which may last up to one year.

Medical Requirements

- Candidates have had a complete history and physical exam with labs done *at* or outside FCH within the last 90 days and all results have been received by FCH. Outside physicals and lab results must be arranged ahead of time through an FCH medical provider and must include the specific lab tests and screenings indicated by the FCH provider responsible for the candidate's HT.
- Referral for consultation with an outside endocrinologist has been deemed not medically necessary to initiation of HT, or has occurred, if recommended or if requested by the candidate or the FCH medical provider.
- Based on client's history, physical exam, and/or current medical conditions, hormone therapy has been deemed medically appropriate.
- Laboratory baselines will be obtained and monitored throughout the course of hormone therapy. Clients who are receiving hormone therapy are required to continue medical and laboratory evaluations on a regular basis, as specified by client's medical provider. Clients who do not adhere to the treatment plan may have their hormone treatment discontinued.
- Candidate has determined individual private insurance coverage for treatment and has agreed to a payment plan to pay FCH for all services that are not covered.