GENDER-AFFIRMING HORMONE THERAPY

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Fenway Health
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GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

1. Review the importance of gender-affirmation and the process of initiating hormone therapy through the informed consent model

2. Provide an overview of masculinizing and feminizing hormone therapy

3. Review realistic expectations and benefits of hormone therapy vs their associated risks

4. Discuss recommendations for monitoring
TRANSITION/GENDER AFFIRMATION

- Social, legal, and/or medical processes that a person may undertake to affirm or express their gender identity
  - Social – Name, Pronoun
  - Medical – Hormones, Surgery
  - Legal – Identity Documents

- The term **Gender affirmation** is more inclusive of a full range of experiences
HORMONE “READINESS”

YOU SHALL NOT PASS!

vs.

Risks vs. Benefits

ADVANCING EXCELLENCE IN SEXUAL AND GENDER MINORITY HEALTH
TRANSGENDER STANDARDS OF CARE
The criteria for hormone therapy are as follows:

1. Well-documented, persistent (at least 6mo) gender dysphoria
2. Capacity to make a fully informed decision and to consent for treatment
3. Age of majority in a given country
4. If significant medical or mental health concerns are present, they must be reasonably well controlled
INFORMED CONSENT MODEL

▪ Has been recognized by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) as being the standard of care
  ▪ Patient autonomy and empowering agency
  ▪ Decreasing barriers to medically necessary care

“The previous versions of the SOC were always perceived to be about the things that a trans person must do to satisfy clinicians, this version is much more clearly about every aspect of what clinicians ought to do in order to properly serve their clients. That is a truly radical reversal . . . one that serves both parties very well.”

CHRISTINE BURNS, SOC INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER
INFORMED CONSENT MODEL

- Requires healthcare provider to
  - Effectively communicate benefits, risks and alternatives of treatment to patient
  - Assess that the patient is able to understand and consent to the treatment

- Informed consent model does not preclude mental health care
- Recognizes that prescribing decision ultimately rests with clinical judgment of provider working together with the patient
  - Informed consent is not equivalent to treatment on demand
INITIAL VISITS

- Typically 2 visits, at least 1 long (40min) and 1 short (20)
  - Review history of gender experience
  - Document prior hormone use
  - Obtain sexual history
  - Review patient goals
  - Address safety concerns
  - Assess social support system
  - Assess appropriateness for gender affirming medical treatment
  - Obtain informed consent
    - Review risks and benefits of hormone therapy
  - Assess medical safety
    - CPE
      - Order screening laboratory studies
  - Provide referrals
GENDER NARRATIVES

- A gender narrative refers to a personal history of experienced gender awareness, development, exploration, acceptance/rejection, identification, persistence, and clarification.

- INDIVIDUAL, there is no one, “right” story
  - ex: I was born in the wrong body. I only played with girls toys growing up.

- Things to consider
  - Intersectionality - the complexity of multiple identities overlapping and existing together (gender, race, socioeconomic status, religious beliefs, age, ability, etc).
  - Non-binary/Queer/GNC
  - Gender narratives and identities are fluid.
COMPLICATED CASES

- Body dysmorphia vs Gender dysphoria
- Complicated mental health co-morbidities
  - Schizophrenia
  - Other active psychosis
  - Dissociative Identity disorder/Multiple personality disorder
- Autism spectrum disorders
- Serious medical co-morbidities
  - CVD with previous MI/stroke, clotting disorders
  - Cancer
  - Uncontrolled diabetes, HTN, hyperlipidemia, smokers
**COMPLICATED CASES**

- **Remember ...**
- 4. If significant medical or mental health concerns are present, they must be *reasonably well controlled*.

- **Take your time**
  - What is reasonable in terms of control?
  - Refer to specialist if needed (remember, YOU are the gender specialist! and may need to educate and also advocate for your patient)
  - Try not to let your timeline and anxiety get intertwined with your patients’ timeline and pressures
    - Work together. Be transparent. ...
COMPLICATED CASES

- Trans identity can exist separately from behavioral health issues
  - How did or does the gender identity develop/impact/play a role in their other BH issues?
  - How will gender affirming hormone therapy affect this underlying BH issue?
  - Does the patient have adequate supports?
  - Does the patient have the capacity to understand and consent to treatment and have realistic expectations of hormone therapy?

- Harm Reduction
  - Consider barriers to care, supports, stability. You may need to meet patients where they are ... getting our of OUR comfort zone

- QUALITY OF LIFE
TAKING A HISTORY

- Same as for all patients, but pay specific attention to health disparities
- Be aware of contexts that increase health risks
  - What are risk factors for smoking, substance use, or engaging in sexual risk behaviors? What is the incidence of trauma/abuse in this population?
- Ask about social support; be aware of possible rejection by family or community of origin, harassment, and discrimination
- Ask about use of cross-sex hormones, gender affirmation surgeries, and use of silicone
LABORATORY MONITORING
BASELINE

- **Transmasculine**
  - CBC (Hgb/Hct)
  - Lipid Profile, *only as clinically indicated*
  - Liver Enzymes, *only if evidence of underlying liver disease*
  - Fasting Glucose, *only if clinically indicated*
  - Screen for PCOS with +ROS, ??

- **Transfeminine**
  - Baseline kidney function
  - Lipid Profile, *only as clinically indicated*
  - Liver Enzymes, *only if evidence of underlying liver disease*
  - Fasting Glucose, *only if clinically indicated*
MASCULINIZING HORMONE OPTIONS

- **Injectable Testosterone**
  - Testosterone Enanthate or Cypionate IM or SC, q1 or 2 weeks

- **Weekly Dosing versus Biweekly Dosing**
  - Consider susceptibility of peak/trough levels with biweekly dosing. Consider mental health diagnosis

- **Standard Weekly Dose:** 50 – 100 mg / week
  - Starting at 50mg/week and increase in 1 month

- **Standard Biweekly Dose:** 150-200 mg / 2 weeks
  - Starting with 100mg/biweekly and increase in 1 month
TRANSDERMAL TESTOSTERONE

• Patches
  ▪ Androderm: (2 & 4 mg patches) Apply 2-8mg/ day

• Topical gels in packets and pumps
  • Apply 50 – 100 mg / day
  ▪ Androgel pump: 1.62% gives 20.25 mg per pump
    • 2 pumps for starting dose
  ▪ Androgel or Testim packets: provide 25 mg (2.5 gm) or 50 mg (5 gm)
    • Generally start with 50mg packet
    • Intended to be applied to Arm > Abdomen > Inner thigh
  ▪ Axiron 2% pump gel for axillary application: 1 pump (30 mg) to each axilla daily
OTHER OPTIONS

- **Testosterone Pellet**
  - Testopel - Implant 8-12 pellets q 3 to 4 months

- **Testosterone undecanoate**
  - AVEED - Injectable long-acting. 750mg/3mL injection every 10wks, with initial loading dose
ADDITIONAL MEDICATIONS

- **Testosterone cream/DHT cream** for clitoral enlargement

- **Estrogen vaginal cream** for atrophy
  - Also can be used for inadequate pap tests

- **Rogaine or Finasteride** for male pattern baldness

- **Progesterone – LARC (IUD, Nexplanon), Depo**, which may aid in cessation of menses before or after starting testosterone therapy
## TIMELINE FOR MASCULINIZING EFFECTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Onset (months)</th>
<th>Maximum (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skin oiliness/acne</td>
<td>1-6</td>
<td>1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat redistribution</td>
<td>1-6</td>
<td>2-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cessation of Menses</td>
<td>2-6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clitoral enlargement*</td>
<td>3-6</td>
<td>1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaginal atrophy</td>
<td>3-6</td>
<td>1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional changes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased sex drive</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Increased sex drive may occur after 2 years.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Onset (months)</th>
<th>Maximum (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deepening of voice*</td>
<td>3-12</td>
<td>1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facial/Body Hair Growth*</td>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>4-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scalp Hair Loss*</td>
<td>6-12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased Muscle Mass &amp; Strength</td>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>2-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coarser Skin/ Increased Sweating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Weight Gain/Fluid Retention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mild Breast Atrophy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Weakening of Tendons</td>
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</tbody>
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RISKS OF TESTOSTERONE THERAPY

- Lower HDL & Elevate TG
- Polycythemia/erythrocytosis
- Limited long-term data: breast, endometrial tissue, ovarian tissue
  - Good short-medium term data!
- Increased risk of sleep apnea
- Increase insulin resistance?
- Infertility
- Chronic pelvic pain
- Mental health effects
- ?? Hepatotoxicity (with oral formulations)
  - Much less risk with parenteral formulations
FOLLOW UP LAB MONITORING

▪ Serum testosterone levels
  • At 6 and 12 months, then as clinically indicated
  • If using topical, consider checking testosterone level at 3 months
  • May be checked 6 to 12 weeks after dosage change
  • Goal Range: ~350-900 ng/dl

▪ Estradiol levels?
  • Goal Range: less than 50 pg/ml
    • Do not need to check if T in therapeutic range.
    • Only check if not masculinizing, abnormal bleeding, etc.
FOLLOW UP LAB MONITORING

- After 6 months → then every 6 to 12 months
  - Hct/Hgb
  - Lipid Profile, as clinically indicated
  - Fasting Glucose or HbA1c, as clinically indicated
    - Testosterone may impact glucose metabolism, increasing insulin resistance
FEMINIZING HORMONE OPTIONS

▪ **Oral Estrogens**
  ▪ Estradiol (estrace) 2-8 mg PO or SL daily (can be divided into BID dosing)
  ▪ Premarin (conjugated estrogens) 1.25-10mg PO daily (can be divided into BID dosing)

▪ **Injectable Estrogens**
  ▪ Estradiol valerate 5-20mg IM q2 weeks
  ▪ Estradiol cypionate 2-10mg IM weekly

▪ **Transdermal Estrogens**
  ▪ Estradiol patch 0.1-0.4mg twice weekly, may start lower in patients at risk of side effects.
  Maximum single dose patch available is 0.1 mg
ANTIANDROGENS

- **Spironolactone** (aldactone) 50-400mg PO daily (can be divided into BID dosing)

- 5-alpha reductase inhibitors: finasteride (Proscar) and dutasteride - Inhibits conversion of testosterone to DHT

- Casodex (bicalutamide) - non-steroidal androgen receptor inhibitor
- Lupron $$$ - Leutinizing hormone (LH) releasing hormone agonist, more simply called a GnRH agonist

- Cyproterone acetate - synthetic progestagen with strong anti-androgen activity
WHAT ABOUT PROGESTINS?

- Benefit on breast development??
- Part of the “natural” female hormonal make-up

**Risks**
- No clear evidence of this
- Associated with increased risk of cardiovascular events and breast cancer in WHI - but how does this translate to trans women?
- Also risk of weight gain and depression

**Benefits**
- Weight gain!, moodiness!/cycling
- Improved mood
- Improved libido, energy
**PROGESTINS**

- **Prometrium 100 mg – 200 mg po daily**
- **Provera 2.5 to 10 mg PO daily**
- **Depo-Provera 150 mg IM q 3 months**

Consider daily, even dosing vs cyclic administration of oral progestin: 10 days each month, to lower total exposure to progestin and/or to more closely mimic female physiology.
## FEMINIZING EFFECTS OF ESTROGENS & ANTIANDROGENS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Onset (months)</th>
<th>Maximum (months)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decreased Libido</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>3-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased Spontaneous Erections</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breast Growth*</td>
<td>3-6</td>
<td>24-36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased Testicular Volume*</td>
<td>3-6</td>
<td>24-36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased Sperm Production*</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redistribution of Body Fat</td>
<td>3-6</td>
<td>24-36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease in Muscle Mass</td>
<td>3-6</td>
<td>12-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Softening of Skin</td>
<td>3-6</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased Terminal Hair</td>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>&gt;36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** Possible slowing or cessation of scalp hair loss, but no regrowth

- No change in voice
RISKS OF ESTROGEN THERAPY

- Venous thrombosis/thromboembolism
- Increased risk of cardiovascular disease
- Weight gain
- Decreased libido
- Hypertriglyceridermia

- Elevated blood pressure
- Decreased glucose tolerance
- Gallbladder disease
- Benign pituitary prolactinoma
- Mental health effects
- Infertility
RISKS OF SPIRONOLACTONE THERAPY

- Increased urinary frequency
- Hyperkalemia
  - Co-administration with ACE inhibitor or ARB
- Hypotension
- Dehydration and renal insufficiency
  - Co-administration with HCTZ
LAB MONITORING FOR TRANS FEMININE PATIENTS

- Serum testosterone level (at 6 to 12 months)
  - Should be less than 55 ng/dl

- Serum Estradiol Levels (?)
  - Ideal level is the mean daily level for premenopausal women (about 100 to 200 pg/ml)
  - Timing of blood draw?
LAB MONITORING FOR TRANS FEMININE PATIENTS

- If on spironolactone —
  - serum electrolytes 2 to 6 weeks after start/dosage change
  - every 3 months in first year
  - then yearly

- Lipids, glucose, LFTs only as clinically indicated
  - Prolactin level ?? vs only with +ROS

- Hgb/Hct will often drop into the normal female range in women on CSHT
NON-BINARY INDIVIDUALS

- Adjust doses of spironolactone and/or estradiol to maintain testosterone levels in a range between standard male and female levels
- Use of anti-androgens alone
- Limited courses of hormone therapy
- Surgical affirmation without hormone treatment
FOLLOW UP CARE FOR GENDER-AFFIRMING HORMONE THERAPY

- Assess masculinization or feminization
  - Think about particular considerations for non-binary, gender fluid, and gender queer patients
    - Low dose hormones, surgery w/o hormones, short term hormone use, etc
- Review medication use
- Monitor mood cycles and adjust medication as indicated
- Discuss social impact of transition
- Counsel regarding sexual activity
  - Remember that this can change! Sexual orientation, experimentation, increased confidence, increased libido
- Review surgical options
- Plans change of name and gender marker on legal forms
- Review CAD risk factors
- ASSESS SAFETY
Questions?