

15 June 2018

Gloria Fraser

Email: fyi-request-7913-d863959b@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Ms Fraser

Re: Official Information Act Request

I refer to your Official Information Act request received on 25 May 2018 in which you specifically requested the following:

- 1) Could you please advise whether the following gender-affirming healthcare services are funded by the Southern District Health Board for transgender patients, and whether the services are currently available: - Hormone therapy - Mastectomy - Hysterectomy - Orchidectomy - Facial hair removal - Breast augmentation - Voice training.***

Gender-affirming services are not routinely funded, however funding is considered when a specialist submits a funding request for a specific patient. Southern DHB have approved funding for individual patients for the following procedures: voice training, laparoscopic hysterectomy and oophorectomy.

- 2) Could you please provide information about the process of accessing those services that are available? a) Specifically, is an assessment by a mental health professional required in order to access gender-affirming healthcare services? If so, which services? b) In the case of hormone therapy, can primary health providers prescribe hormones, or does this have to be initially approved by an endocrinologist? c) Is any period of real life experience required to access surgery?***

Services are available according to the individual's mental health needs, which may include psychology, psychiatry inpatient admission, day programmes are therapeutic options, but access is not solely determined by diagnosis. Not all patients treated for gender dysphoria remain in contact with mental health services, though they may remain in contact with non-psychiatric medical professionals if they wish to continue medical/surgical treatments for gender dysphoria. Some patients with gender dysphoria will not be in contact with either mental health services or with medical services.

Patients referred to the endocrinology department for consideration of hormonal therapy must have been formally diagnosed with gender dysphoria by an appropriate health professional. In Dunedin this is usually performed by consultants with experience in gender

dysphoria in the psychiatry service, but occasionally by a suitably experienced clinical psychologist. Primary care may continue hormonal therapy with the advice of an endocrinologist, however, almost all patients with gender dysphoria commence their hormonal treatment under the supervision of an endocrinologist. Although there is no firm ruling on this matter it is generally accepted that patients should be living in the new gender for approximately 2 years before being considered for irreversible surgical intervention.

3) Finally, could you please advise what the process is if transgender patients require one of the above services, but the Southern District Health Board does not offer this service? Does the Southern District Health Board currently fund patients to travel to other areas to access this healthcare?

Mental Health services would refer to the appropriate physical health services within the Southern District Health Board for any service outside of mental health. The National Travel Assistance programme would be used if necessary.

Psychiatric services and endocrinological services have always been available for patients with gender dysphoria. Surgery has not always been available but previously was performed in Christchurch upon referral. This is now no longer available. Some limited surgical interventions have recently become available in Dunedin – e.g. orchidectomy, breast reduction surgery.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review of our decision by the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman's Office can be contacted on 0800 802 602 or on-line at <http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz/>.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris Fleming', written over a faint circular stamp.

Chris Fleming
Chief Executive Officer