

## **Gender identity services for children and young people: making compassionate, professional and ethical decisions.**

“Clinical staff are governed by professional, legal and ethical guidance which demands that certain standards are met before a treatment can be provided. Clinicians carry responsibility for their assessment and recommendations, and any harm that might be caused to a patient under their care. This can create a tension between the aspirations of the young person and the responsibilities of the clinician.”  
Dr Hilary Cass

### **A Resource for Pharmacists<sup>1</sup>**

This is a resource for pharmacy professionals about providing information, support and services to children and young people with gender incongruence or dysphoria.

Recent developments including the publication of the final [Cass Report](#) and various national policy updates have raised complex questions for pharmacy professionals about prescriptions for puberty suppressing hormones, cross-sex hormones and related medicines for children and young people.

We also know that patients and their families may be looking to their pharmacy teams for information, support and care at this time. We don't expect pharmacists to be prescribing in this context, but we recognise there may be challenges and questions associated with the supply of medicines.

Pharmacy teams providing pharmacy services to children and young people with gender incongruence or dysphoria need to adhere to the standard process of clinical assessment and care provision they have been trained to take as healthcare professionals. The starting point is that pharmacy professionals must provide compassionate, inclusive and person-centred care, within the current relevant legal and regulatory context. It's essential that all patients have access to appropriate, high-quality and respectful healthcare, free from discrimination or bias.

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<sup>1</sup> Acknowledgement is given to GPhC paper, Gender identity services for children and young people: making compassionate, professional and ethical decisions published in May 2024. Sections are used with permission and acknowledged as GPhC copyright.

We have set out the associated questions that pharmacy professionals should ask themselves when making decisions about the supply of medicines in this context. These apply to the provision of services in person or online.

## **Making decisions on supply: issues to consider and questions to ask yourself. Professional behaviour, personal values and beliefs**

- Have I made the care of the person my first priority, ensuring that all interactions are non-judgemental, compassionate, inclusive and free from discrimination or bias?
- Have I taken responsibility for ensuring that person-centred care is not compromised because of religion, personal values, or beliefs, including my own?
- Have I have taken into account the Pharmaceutical Society NI's [Guidance on the provision of services](#).

### **Professional Judgement**

- Am I competent to supply these medicines and working within the scope of my practice?
- Have I taken a holistic view of the person's individual needs, including any mental health or neurodevelopment issues that may impact on gender-related distress?

### **Supporting vulnerable or at-risk patients**

- Am I aware of the complex ways that safeguarding issues may be present, adhering to the principles of safeguarding and risk management?
- Have I identified and taken appropriate action for any children, young people or families who may be vulnerable, or at risk?

### **Consent confidentiality and effective communication**

- Have I obtained appropriate and informed consent to make the supply, taking into account the person's capacity and understanding?
- Am I working within the relevant legal framework, taking account of the role and legal responsibilities of parents, where relevant?
- Have I obtained consent to contact the person's GP and other professionals involved in their long-term care?
- Have I encouraged the person to discuss their treatment with their prescriber or other care providers?

## **Clinical Appropriateness of medicines**

We know that pharmacy professionals may be concerned about dispensing prescriptions or emergency supplies to children and young people, which they do not feel able to supply in line with appropriate professional standards. This includes prescriptions from prescribers working in a gender clinic outside Northern Ireland. It is not enough for a prescription to simply be legally valid. That is just one consideration alongside others, including the responsible pharmacist's judgement as to whether a prescription is clinically appropriate for the individual patient.

- Have I taken account of relevant national and local policies, regulatory standards and guidance?
- Have I taken account of the evidence that informed the work of the [Cass Report](#) and the review's findings about the 'lack of high-quality evidence' (p20 of the review) in this area?
- Is the prescription clinically appropriate and legally valid?
- Have I got enough information to be able to make a safe supply or do I need to follow up with the prescriber?
- Have I taken active steps to assure myself that the prescriber, including those from outside Northern Ireland, has sufficient expertise to assess and diagnose gender incongruence or dysphoria?
- Have I taken active steps to assure myself that the prescriber, including those from outside Northern Ireland, is complying with relevant UK regulatory and professional guidance?
- Are there any risks that might be associated with declining to make a supply or abruptly discontinuing to make a supply, including where the patient has previously been taking particular medicines?
- Can I justify my decision to supply / not supply, particularly against a prescription issued by an outside Northern Ireland clinician or prescriber, as this may pose additional risk?
- Have I made a record of my decision, including any discussions with the prescriber and the person seeking care?

## **Partnership Working**

- Have I identified any follow up or monitoring needs for the person?
- Have I signposted the person to relevant sources of support, as needed?

## **Next steps**

We're continuing to monitor external developments closely, working collaboratively with key partners across the health and care sector. We will issue more communications and further advice as this work progresses.

**The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland**

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