

Southern Health

Corporate Office.
Monash Medical Centre
246 Clayton Road
Clayton Victoria 3168
Australia

Postal address:
Locked Bag 29
Clayton South Victoria
3169
Australia

tel (03) 9594 2738
fax (03) 9594 6590

10 March 2006

Mr Ian Holland
Secretary
Select Committee on Mental Health
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Holland

SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON MENTAL HEALTH

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the matters raised by Mr Ken McGuire in his submission dated 6 February 2006 on behalf of the members of the Gender Identity Awareness Association in relation to the functions of the Gender Dysphoria Service, Mental Health Program, Southern Health.

The Gender Dysphoria Service is a Clinic which has as its Director, Dr Trudy Kennedy, a Fellow of the Royal Australian New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, who is considered a world expert in this highly specialised area of gender identity. The Clinic functions as a collaboration between the Mental Health Program, Southern Health and a number of private health care providers. The overall team includes psychiatrists, a psychologist, an administrator, a speech pathologist, endocrinologist, and surgeons who specialise in gender re-assignment surgery.

The Clinic, as part of its protocol requires that each person who is referred or self refers to the Clinic undertakes a psychiatric assessment by two qualified psychiatrists, is reviewed (when necessary) by a psychologist, has advice from speech pathology, (as appropriate) undertakes hormonal replacement in the private health care sector and undergoes assessment as to suitability for surgery. Sometimes, in addition, a person is referred for ongoing psychological support, either to a psychologist or a psychiatrist. Patients who are referred for assessment as to suitability for surgery are usually required to have completed a two-year "lived experience" in the preferred gender, either here in Victoria or in their home state.

The submission correctly states that there are very few services in Australia that provide support to patients with gender identity disorder. It is important that your Committee is aware that many patients report immense satisfaction with the Gender Dysphoria Service provided through Southern Health.

Members of the Clinic, as part of the assessment process, spend significant time with patients to explore their options. The majority of patients who are referred or self refer do not proceed to gender re-assignment surgery. In fact, most patients are ultimately either referred back to their referring source or, where clinicians associated with the Clinic think it appropriate, may be referred to other services for psychological and/or psychiatric support.

Southern Health

Dandenong Hospital
Kingston Centre
Cranbourne Integrated
Care Centre

Monash Medical Centre
Casey Hospital

Community Health
Services across the
South East

Following the assessment by two psychiatrists, the psychologist, the endocrinologist and the surgeon (or, indeed, at any stage of their involvement with the Clinic) a patient is free to seek a second, outside opinion. Such a request would be facilitated by the Clinic or can be self-arranged by the patient.

Where a patient proceeds to surgery, that surgery is undertaken in an ACHS accredited private hospital in Victoria by a private surgeon. Surgery is preceded by a consent process which culminates in detailed documentation being signed by the patient and independently witnessed. This important process is part of preparation for surgery.

Members of the clinical team within the Southern Health Mental Health Program, and the private health care providers associated with the Clinic, would strongly object to any inference that they have influenced the decision of patients, who have been assessed as competent to make their own decisions following a detailed psychiatric assessment, to accept in an informed way any of the treatment offered.

As a Service, we are aware of concerns expressed by Mr McGuire in relation to the Clinic. Southern Health has had extensive contact with him over the last five years to receive his feedback and respond to his concerns.

If there any further information that Southern Health can provide to the Senate Inquiry, please do not hesitate to let us know.

Yours sincerely



Linda Sorrell
Chief Executive

cc. Dr Trudy Kennedy, Director, Gender Dysphoria Clinic
Associate Professor Alex Cockram, Executive Director, Mental Health Program
Mr John Snowdon, Corporate Counsel, Southern Health