

Case 25: A Difficult Decision

Mental health is an issue that has been overlooked for many years, but has more recently been pushed into the national spotlight. Mental health diagnoses are now often accepted reasons for various medical procedures. For example, gender dysphoria is a condition in which a person strongly feels as if they do not identify as the gender they were assigned at birth and may subsequently undergo gender reassignment therapy. Gender reassignment therapy is a general term for many types of specific treatment for gender dysphoria, including, but not limited to, hormone replacement therapy, individual or family therapy, peer support groups, or even reassignment surgery. It is also a very difficult process for any individuals involved and can be stressful, time-consuming, and expensive. Additionally, although there is not a tremendous amount of evidence, medical professionals have come to a general consensus that gender reassignment therapy is an effective and acceptable treatment for select patients that have been diagnosed with gender dysphoria.

Sarah, a 15-year old individual, has recently realized that she wants to go through with a transition to the opposite gender as she has spent many years feeling uncomfortable in her own body. She has also been officially diagnosed with gender dysphoria by a psychiatrist. This diagnosis has been preceded by a host of other issues including bouts of depression and an eating disorder. These health issues have greatly affected Sarah's life in many aspects, including in school and in her social life. This decision has been difficult for Sarah even as her mother supports her decision and is willing to pay for the reassignment surgery. However, her father is very religious and firmly believes being transgender is "unnatural." Because of this view, Sarah has a reason to believe that her father probably would not support this decision and this could

perhaps put a large burden on her parents' marriage, as well as the rest of the family. Sarah's psychiatrist has also recommended that Sarah continue with regular appointments as well as begin hormone replacement therapy, both of which are extremely expensive. Because she is a minor, at least one parent must consent to any medical treatment or procedures. However, many hospitals and/or doctors are hesitant to initiate treatments or procedures that may pose significant risk to the patient or that one parent is firmly against because of personal or religious reasons.

At the moment, Sarah's family has health insurance through her father's current job and gender reassignment therapy is covered under their insurance policy. This situation is also particularly difficult as her father is considering taking a new job. This new job would provide him a similar salary as his current job, but more significantly, it would provide him better opportunities for career advancement. However, the health insurance policy provided by the new employer would not cover gender reassignment therapy. Subsequently, if he were to take the new job, the family would have to pay for all related expenses out of pocket, which could add an additional strain on the family's finances and the parents' marriage.

Study Questions

1. What responsibilities does Sarah's father have, especially regarding Sarah, and how should he prioritize them?
2. Should/do patients, even minors, have the right to demand medical procedures even if a certain procedure is not medically necessary?
3. Do children have a responsibility to maintain their parents' happiness?

4. Should the doctor attempt to obtain both parents' consent for the procedure?

Sources

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3. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10508-012-9975-x>
4. <https://www.omic.com/informed-consent-for-minor-patients/>