

Background

This document is a compilation of frequently asked questions posed at the Gender Surgery Program BC client information session held on September 18, 2019.

To protect patient privacy, this document does not address individual cases. Questions relating to surgical procedures, techniques and complications at the individual level will be answered during the patient's initial consultation with the surgeons.

VGH Gender Surgery Clinic

Q What is the referral and surgery process?

A 1. Obtain a referral to the Gender Surgery Program BC at VGH

Your primary care provider sends a referral, including your two completed surgical readiness assessments, to the Gender Surgery Program's clinic at VGH. The referral form can be found on Vancouver Coastal Health's website here: <http://www.vch.ca/Locations-Services/GSPBC>

2. Meet with the surgeons for a consultation

When the Gender Surgery Clinic receives your referral and assessments, you will be placed on the waitlist for a consultation. A clerk will contact you to book a consultation with the surgeons.

3. Prepare for surgery

When you're ready for surgery, you'll be placed on the surgery waitlist. You will be contacted when your surgery date is confirmed, and the Gender Surgery Clinic team will help prepare you for your surgery.

4. Have surgery and recover

Complete your surgery at the most appropriate care facility in Vancouver. As part of your recovery and post-operation care, you will attend follow-up appointments at the Gender Surgery Clinic at VGH.

5. Discharge to primary care provider

When your post-operative care is complete, you will be discharged from the Gender Surgery Clinic to your primary care provider for any required ongoing care.

Q How is the waitlist for initial consultation constructed?

A During the clinic's first six months of operation, client files previously held by Trans Care BC will be prioritized based on their current waitlist status. Any new referrals received during this period will be prioritized based on the date of the patient's second surgical readiness assessment.

After the clinic's first six months of operation, all referrals will be triaged based on when their completed referral package arrives at the clinic.

Patients referred to the Gender Surgery Program BC can expect to be seen for consult within a year of their paper work being received.

Q What are the wait times for surgery?

A The wait-time target set by the Ministry of Health is 26 weeks. The wait time for surgery begins when you're medically ready, willing and able to go on the surgical waitlist. Your readiness will be determined in consultation with your surgeon(s) and the clinic team.

Q Who is part of the VCH clinic team?

A The clinic team consists of a multidisciplinary team of nurses, surgeons and allied health providers who will work together to support you through the various stages of your surgical journey.

Q What is the minimum age for the Gender Surgery Program BC?

A As per the World Professional Association for Transgender Health's standards of care 7, the age for access to lower gender-affirming surgery is the age of the majority, which in British Columbia is 18 years of age.

Q Can peers/family members attend consultations?

A Yes, family, friends and peers are encouraged to attend. However, please be mindful of how many people you bring with you as the clinic rooms can only accommodate 1-2 extra support people.

Q What experience do the surgeons have?

A Dr. Krista Genoway, M.D., FRCSC

Dr. Genoway is a board-certified plastic and reconstructive surgeon. She completed her medical school and residency training in plastic and reconstructive surgery at the University of British Columbia. She then completed a fellowship in reconstructive microsurgery with a sub-specialty focus on providing gender-affirming surgical care in San Francisco, California. Dr. Genoway began offering upper chest surgery, including chest contouring and breast construction (augmentation), in 2016, and masculinizing and feminizing lower surgery in 2019. She is a clinical instructor in the Department of Surgery at the University of B.C.

Dr. Alex Kavanagh BSc. PEngg. MPH. MD. FRCSC

Dr. Kavanagh is a reconstructive urologist certified by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. He completed medical school at the University of Calgary and a Master of Public Health at Harvard University. His urologic residency was completed at UBC, and he has since completed a fellowship in female pelvic medicine and reconstructive surgery in Houston, as well as a fellowship in male urethral and pelvic reconstruction with Dr. Sanjay Kulkarni. Dr. Kavanagh has also completed visiting fellowships at several centres of excellence in gender-affirming surgery, including Crane and Brownstein Surgical (Drs. Curtis Crane and Richard Santucci), the New York Langone School of Medicine (Dr. Lee Zhao) and Mount Sinai Hospital (Dr. Ting).

Q What makes BC the best option for gender-affirming surgery?

A Gender-affirming surgery is a complex procedure and it is not uncommon to experience post-operative complications. These can vary from mild to more significant complications. If complications do arise, having surgery closer to home ensures that you have access to your surgical team for both routine follow up and if you experience any issues in your post-op healing. Reducing the stress and strain of travel will also help improve surgical outcomes and the overall surgical experience while reducing the uncertainties and expenses involved with long-distance travel out of province.

Q Will you offer virtual meetings via skype/zoom?

A Some appointments will be available via Telehealth videoconferencing; however, the clinic is asking all clients to attend the initial consultation in person at VGH.

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Q Is the pelvic floor physiotherapy covered by MSP?

A Yes, you will be referred to a pelvic floor physiotherapist within VCH which is covered by MSP.

Surgery

Q What surgeries will be offered by the Gender Surgery Program BC?

A **Feminizing Procedures**

- orchiectomy
- vaginoplasty
- vulvoplasty
- revision surgery

Masculinizing Procedures

- metoidioplasty
- clitoral release
- phalloplasty
- penile and testicular implant surgery
- revision surgery

Q Why are revisions listed as a surgery option? Are they inevitable?

A Revisions are not inevitable. Many people are happy with the outcomes of their initial surgery and require no further surgery outside of planned surgical stages. However, there are times when the surgical team might recommend a revision surgery if there is an unexpected outcome or complication that can be surgically addressed. This is best discussed with your surgical team during your consult and at your post-op follow appointments. In other cases, surgical intervention is intentionally staged for prosthetic implants or urethral continuity.

Q What complications are common after a vaginoplasty?

- A** Possible complications vary with each case and depend on the individual. At the initial consultation, your surgeons and clinic staff will explain the surgery and associated complications, including:
- infection
 - hematoma
 - tissue loss or necrosis
 - urinary retention
 - urinary infection
 - urethral meatal stenosis
 - neovaginal prolapse
 - rectovaginal fistula
 - urethrovaginal fistula
 - loss of depth and width of the vaginal cavity
 - hyper granulation tissue
 - anesthetic and other medical/general surgical complications

Q What complications are common after a phalloplasty?

- A** Possible complications vary with each case and depend on the individual. At the initial consultation, your surgeons and clinic staff will explain the surgery and associated complications, including:
- infection
 - hematoma
 - tissue loss or necrosis
 - urinary retention
 - urinary infection
 - urethral stricture
 - urethral fistula
 - retained vaginal remnant
 - anesthetic and other medical/general surgical complications

Q On average, how long does a patient need fulltime care at home after surgery?

A Each patient's experience is unique and depends on several factors, including the surgery involved. We provide estimates at the time of consultation and our multidisciplinary team will help to ensure that appropriate supports are in place prior to surgery.

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Q For patients living outside Lower Mainland, how long should they expect to be away from home?

A Each patient's experience is unique and depends on several factors, including the surgery involved. All follow-up appointments are conducted at the Gender Surgery Clinic at VGH or if appropriate via Telehealth videoconferencing for patients living outside the Lower Mainland.

Out-of-province/Out-of-country surgery

Q Can I go out of province and/or out of country for lower surgery?

A British Columbians still have the option to pursue their surgery at Gender Reassignment Surgery (GRS) Montreal. When medically necessary, patients may access out-of-country surgery according to MSP guidelines. The guidelines can be found [here](#).

Q If I go to Montreal for surgery, who takes care of me in B.C.?

A The GSPBC will not see patients for routine follow up who have completed surgery at GRS Montreal. Patients who have surgery at GRS Montreal will have their follow-up coordinated by GRS Montreal and their primary care provider.

Hair removal

Q Will there be financial support for medically necessary hair removal?

A The Ministry of Health has confirmed that funding will be available for medically necessary hair removal as a prerequisite to lower gender-affirming surgery. Patients cannot access funded hair removal services prior to being directed to do so by the Gender Surgery Program BC.

Q Why is hair removal required in B.C. but not in Montreal?

A We believe hair removal is a medically necessary component of lower gender affirmation surgery for some patients. Although many centres are migrating towards this perspective, it's not maintained across all gender affirmation programs. Patients will be assessed on an individualized basis to determine if hair removal is required for them.

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Q Do I need to have laser or electrolysis for vaginoplasty?

A Hair removal requirements for surgery will be determined by surgeons on an individualized basis. Electrolysis is generally the recommendation of leading clinics for hair removal as it is considered to be permanent. Some patients may be recommended to complete a combination of laser and electrolysis. This will be determined by the hair removal specialist in partnership with the Gender Surgery Program BC and Trans Care BC.

Q What are the recommended timelines regarding hair removal?

A It usually takes 12-18 months for permanent hair removal to be completed. However, this is dependent on the individual and will be discussed in more depth at your initial consultation.

Q Will the program connect patients with hair removal technicians?

A Once a patient has been approved for hair removal they will be given a list of hair removal providers that have been approved by Trans Care BC.

Q Will you publish a diagram of the areas that need hair removal?

A This will be determined in initial consultation with the surgeons and team and, if required, details will be provided to the electrolysis providers and patients.

Gender Surgery Program BC Clinic at VGH

Monday to Friday: 8 to 4 pm

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