

Significant Differences

Recently I had the opportunity to preview a set of professional guidelines for transgendered folk with the opportunity for feedback as a significant other. While most of us are aware of the wide variety of behaviors among the transgendered crowd, I believe it is equally of value to be aware of the significant differences between significant others. Significant others vary as any group - age, sexual preference, children, religion, economic standing, etc. Any set of guidelines for the transgendered, particularly medical, must take into account significant others, recognizing their differences and addressing their specific needs and concerns.

Significant others vary widely - some support their partners wholeheartedly in whatever way they can, whether it be by attending various support groups or participating in social functions. Others prefer to distance themselves from the phenomenon, but are sympathetic. And, of course, not just a few, are so hostile and resentful that separation, if not divorce, may result. Many fall somewhere along the aforementioned spectrum, not totally supportive, not totally critical. Their acceptance in whatever form is shaped also by the particular gender needs of their partner.

Some significant others may only have to deal with their partners' desire to crossdress. Their concerns might revolve around children, family members, jobs, friends, money and time spent on the crossdressing. Others face more serious problems if their partners are transsexual or believe themselves to be transsexual; in addition to the areas already listed, they face concerns and questions about electrolysis, hormones, sexual reassignment surgery, and, above all, the possible loss of the person they married or with whom they have a deep commitment.

Therefore guidelines for those seeking hormone treatment and/or perhaps sexual reassignment surgery should include the family of the transsexual, in particular the wife, recognizing that a variety of acceptance levels must be considered. Although guidelines now stress that hormone treatment should never be started too quickly, definitely, treatment should not be started without the wife being made aware of the decision, whether she is understanding or not. It is her right to know - whether she chooses to be supportive or not is a matter to be left between the husband and wife.

This is not to say that hormone treatment needs the wife's permission; but she needs to be informed. This should be done in the appropriate setting by the helping professional before a prescription is rendered. Since hormones tend to pop up among the transgendered, some legally obtained, others not, perhaps a guide on proper hormone treatment written specifically for the wives, including questions wives in particular may have, should be made available also.

Any decisions made regarding surgery should be made with the knowledge of the wife also. Although some transsexuals may not wish to consult their families or feel this is their business only, if they are married, again the wife has the right to know. If the transsexual feels that there is no way he can involve his wife, then perhaps he needs more time to consider his change.

Certainly taking time to consider the realities is far more prudent than going ahead, informing no one, and then perhaps discovering too late that the wrong course was taken.

Although I would like to suggest that the children be told, I believe this would be too hard as the ages and maturity levels differ so it would be difficult to construct a standard that would meet everyone's need. That decision would be best left to the transsexual and his wife.

Support groups do exist for significant others but they are not equipped to deal with the more serious issues, such as SRS, as these must be addressed by professionals. Therefore any guidelines written for the transgendered by professionals **MUST** consider the significant other, particularly those involved with transsexuals, and would be remiss if they did not do so.

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