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Are You Getting Good Treatment?

Does Your Doctor Follow the Standards of Care?

by Dr. Tracie O'Keefe D.C.H.

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Harry Benjamin

For many years the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association (H.B.I.G.D.A.) has recommended Standards of Care (S.O.C.) to practitioners treating and helping people with sex and gender dysphoria. Many doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists and endocrinologists have fought for and taken a great deal of notice of these standards in order to afford their clients the best possible care.

I know and you know that the S.O.C. are not perfect but they are an ever evolving improvement of the kind of treatment that went before ...

However, some practitioners who are not members of H.B.I.G.D.A. rarely know what those standards are or choose to ignore them. There have also been members of the H.B.I.G.D.A. who have ignored the S.O.C. or never even bothered to read them, affording their clients deficient care.

At the end of the day having S.O.C. that were unenforceable was like having a dog with no bark. What H.B.I.G.D.A. has been missing is a code of ethics that is applicable to all member practitioners and institutions so that the clients can be sure that those S.O.C. are being applied, adhered to and not abused. But H.B.I.G.D.A. is an international organisation

of members from many disciplines, cultures and continents, whose theoretical, philosophical, moral, and social development and standards differ considerably.

I underwent a sex and gender transition some thirty years ago in England and had a really bad time. The psychiatrist, now dead, who treated me was madder than a March hare, and often abused his clients. He kept me waiting seven years for surgery and never failed during that whole time to be rude, arrogant and denigrating towards me. He continually wrote love letters to one of my fellow patients and supplied her with heroin as long as there was some promise she would become his lover. Several of my friends did not survive the abuse he foisted upon them under the guise of treatment and committed suicide.

Two years ago a doctor from the west coast of the U.S.A., who had been struck off, was committed to prison after illegally operating on many desperate transpeople, ruining their bodies and lives. He carried on his butchery for many years with his potential clients being unaware of the danger in which they were placing themselves. The average person in the street often does not know how to check out doctors, surgeons or therapists to see if they are properly qualified and regulated.

Surgery is a risky business because due to the fact that so few surgeons operate in the field of sex and gender transformation it is impossible to truly monitor standards. One must rely on surgeons publishing their results openly and honestly and that is not always the case. The only common existing international connection between them is H.B.I.G.D.A.. If H.B.I.G.D.A. then fails to ensure that surgery is carried out to certain standard, what chance have the clients got?

Another client recently shot her therapist and herself after spending a year in psychotherapy and being refused hormones. I also had a client a few months ago who had been under a psychiatrist in the U.K. for four years and was still not being given hormones, because they were unable to fulfil the psychiatrist's idea of a stereotypical woman.

Endocrinologists, too, are very difficult to work with as many of them simply do not want to carry transpeople's case loads because they fear there may be stigma that might discourage their other business. Neither do many of them bother to carry out sufficient research into gender medicine to give their clients the kind of treatment that is in line with up to date treatment.

I know and you know that the S.O.C. are not perfect but they are an ever evolving improvement on the kind of treatment that went before, in line with what the client group wants, needs or desires. The clients do not always agree with the S.O.C. and the gender community is constantly lobbying organisations like H.B.I.G.D.A. to catch up with developments in social philosophy and freedom for the individual to choose their own path in life. Academia admittedly is sometimes the last sector to realise or react to what is going down on the street but it must be allowed to set a benchmark by which to set the S.O.C. for transpeople. If this were not to happen then there would be no S.O.C. at all. I have been there and, believe me, it is not pretty.

There is little doubt that H.B.I.G.D.A. was set up originally in the early 1970s as an old boys' club for those clinicians practising in the

field of gender medicine, and some of the old boys are still there. They partly wanted a professional association and accreditation to stop themselves being sued when working in the field. But the organisation has evolved to be much more than that. It has become a forum for research, skills sharing and providing information to fuel the fight for equal, lawful treatment of transpeople worldwide. As attitudes to global medicine have changed and become more holistic, so has [H.B.I.G.D.A.](#).

At the 1999 [H.B.I.G.D.A.](#) conference in London, when I talked about many members pissing on the [S.O.C.](#), and assured the members that the gender community would not allow the re-pathologisation of sex and gender expression, I saw senior members of the board place their heads in their hands. The next day the new ethics committee was formed and in September 2000 the code of ethics came into being, binding all members to practise according to the [S.O.C.](#). Change can happen most effectively from within as well as pressure from outside.

The fight as to whether sex and gender identity changes are a pathology or a variation of nature's physical and social expression still rages within [H.B.I.G.D.A.](#) and we must ask ourselves who stands to profit by such debates and stances. But also within [H.B.I.G.D.A.](#) are many dedicated, inspirational and deeply caring professionals who work far beyond the call of duty or profession to make a better world for the trans, and sex and gender variant people throughout the world.

So the path is now clear for clients who have consulted members of [H.B.I.G.D.A.](#) on a professional basis to lodge a complaint to the ethics committee if that service was not up to standard. The ethics committee will then investigate the complaints and if it is upheld the association will be empowered to place its own sanctions on the practitioner concerned. The practitioner will of course be given an opportunity to defend the complaint and also present evidence. Another duty of the ethics committee is to advise on enquiries of ethics and good practice.

Although any sanctions will be limited to [H.B.I.G.D.A.](#) membership, this could serve as an even greater benchmark in the [S.O.C.](#). Clients can be more confident in consulting a practitioner who is a member of [H.B.I.G.D.A.](#) who will be bound to practise according to the [S.O.C.](#), and they will know if they do not get a reasonable service they may seek the help of the ethics committee.

It is my sincere hope that members of [H.B.I.G.D.A.](#) and the public will take the introduction of the code of ethics to heart and be more confident in trusting us to do our jobs to a standard that can help people lead a more fulfilled life. The commercialisation of the sex and gender transitioning industry has meant that a wealthy individual can now simply travel and choose to get the kind of treatment they want, need or desire. However, for the economically disadvantaged they are often still held ransom to less than reasonable [S.O.C.](#) previously without recourse for any distress they have suffered.

Unfortunately we cannot do anything about unethical practitioners who are not members of the [H.B.I.G.D.A.](#), but we would still like to hear about them. Information is power and it is useful for us to know what is going on in the world in order to find the best ways forward for good [S.O.C.](#) to be set in the future.

A list of details to contact any member of the [H.B.I.G.D.A.](#) ethics committee can be found on [the W.P.A.T.H. website](#). ☞ Initially telephone or e-mail enquiries can be a first point of contact if a person wishes, but official complaints about practitioners must be in writing with as much printed and verified evidence as can possibly be provided. Oral evidence must always eventually be turned into a written statement in order for us to process information coherently to all committee members. Since ethics committee members are scattered around the world then it does take some weeks or months for us to investigate a complaint fully. We welcome public input into attaining and maintaining [S.O.C.](#) for all trans, sex and gender variant people we treat and help.

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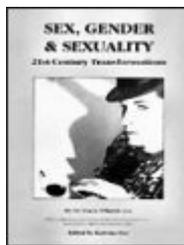
From Tracie O'Keefe's website: ☞ Tracie O'Keefe is a qualified and registered clinical hypnotherapist (A.S.O.C.H.A., psychotherapist, counsellor, mental health professional and trainer, working from a naturopathic perspective in Sydney, Australia. She trained at a post-graduate level with the National School of Hypnosis and Advanced Psychotherapy in London, U.K. U.K.C.P.-recognised school). Her degree and doctorate were earned at the American Institute of Hypnotherapy in the U.S.A. and issued in co-ordination with the Bureau for Private Post-Secondary and Vocational Education in California. She has been a family and couples therapist, a sex therapist and addictions therapist for many years and a qualified naturopath and medical herbalist, who trained in nutritional medicine with the Australian Institute of Applied Sciences. She holds a Bachelor of Health Sciences Degree in Complementary Medicine from Charles Sturt University. She is also an internationally published researcher, author and editor of the following books. [Read more about Dr. Tracie O'Keefe at her website](#) ☞



Trans-X-U-All: The Naked Difference
Author: Tracie O'Keefe and Katrina Fox Publisher: Extraordinary People Press (1997)
I.S.B.N.-13 978-0952948209.

From Google Books: ☞ This fresh and concise work takes an exciting look at the world of transsexuals. It explains the whole gender reassignment process from start to finish and includes deeply moving stories written by transsexuals themselves, their lovers, families and friends. Scientific, factual, informative, it provides, in accessible language, a comprehensive guide to the world of transsexuality.

Sex, Gender & Sexuality: 21st Century Transformations
Author: Tracie O'Keefe and Katrina Fox
Publisher: Extraordinary People Press (1999)
I.S.B.N.-13 978 0952948223



From Google Books:  This book dispels much of the mysticism around physical sex, gender constructs, and the diversity of sexuality. As well as considering gay, lesbian, transsexual and transgendered identities, it also looks at the intersex groups, such as hermaphrodites, and people who identify as androgynous or as being without sex or gender.



Finding the Real Me: True Tales of Sex and Gender Diversity

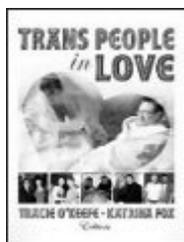
Author: Tracie O'Keefe and Katrina Fox

Publisher: Jossey-Bass (2003)

I.S.B.N.-13 978-0787965471

From Google Books:  *Finding the Real Me* is an extraordinary collection of real-life stories told by a wide-range of sex and gender diverse people. These healing tales of struggle and transformation reveal just how creative, resourceful, and adventurous the individuals in this community can be and also helps to bridge the gap between ignorance and understanding. As each incredible story unfolds we become part of the author's journey to self-acceptance and join the celebration of their

new life. Page by page, we laugh, cry, and learn to appreciate these wonderful courageous people and the road they walked to be their true-selves. *Finding the Real Me* is a landmark book that encourages us to embrace diversity, to never fear our differences, and to remain always in awe of our amazing possibilities.



Trans People in Love

Author: Tracie O'Keefe and Katrina Fox

Publisher: Routledge (2008)

I.S.B.N.-13 978 0789035721

From Google Books:  *Trans People in Love* provides a forum for the experience of being in love and in relationships with significant others for members of the trans community. This honest and respectful volume tells clinicians, scholars, and trans people themselves of the beauty and complexity that trans identity brings to a romantic relationship, what skills and mindsets are needed to forge positive relationships, and demonstrates the reality that trans people in all stages of transition can create

stable and loving relationships that are both physically and emotionally fulfilling.

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The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.