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Phalloplasty

... and what it takes

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Many of us will remember the case of the unfortunate Mr. Bobbitt and the loss of his penis at the hands of his enraged wife. Mr Bobbitt was luckier than some, as the severed section was retrieved, placed in ice and reattached.

To achieve an erection it is necessary to insert an inflatable implant.

The two Western Australian F.T.M.s who have been denied male identity because they refuse genital surgery raises the question of the creation of a neo-phallus where there has been none before.

"This is the worst case scenario", says Dr. Terry Dubrow, a plastic surgeon in the United States, who has performed penis construction in female-to-male sexual reassignment. "You can think of this like any other limb amputation. It's all about preservation of the blood vessels - the arteries and veins."

Dr. Joel Gelman, one of the leading experts in male genital construction and director of the Centre for Reconstructive Urology says "It's a complicated procedure that takes about ten hours and can cost more than \$100,000. [Editors note: To the best of our knowledge this operation is not being performed in Australia so that the cost of travel and accommodation would need to be added]

The phalloplasty involves removing tissue, nerves and tint arteries from an arm to build the new penis. This procedure can leave the arm deformed but functional. A new urethra can be made using skin from a variety of locations in the body and the skin is cut in such a way that it's a tube within a tube, configured so that it has the appearance of a penis.

But even if a blood supply can be attached to the new phallus, it's not really a penis, according to Gelman.

There is not way to construct the glans (head of the penis), for instance, and full feeling will not return. To achieve an erection it is necessary to insert an inflatable implant.

"As sophisticated as phalloplasty has become, it does not really provide anything that's similar or close to functional, and having the cosmetic appearance of a normal penis", Gelman said.

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