**The University Medical Practice**

Partners

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**SURGERY PROTOCOL – 2024-25**

**Prescription of “Bridging Hormones” Whilst Awaiting Specialist Review in a Gender Identity Clinic**

**Document Control**

**A. Confidentiality Notice**

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**B. Document Details**

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| --- | --- |
| **Classification:** | Clinical |
| **Author and Role:** | Sanjiv Basra |
| **Organisation:** | The University Medical Practice |
| **Document Reference:** | Shared Care Prescribing |
| **Current Version Number:** | 1 |
| **Current Document Approved By:** | Dr S Basra |
| **Date Approved:** | Nov 2024 |

**C. Document Revision and Approval History**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Version** | **Date** | **Version Created By:** | **Version Approved By:** | **Comments** |
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We have had an increasing number of enquiries from patients about the prescribing and monitoring of hormone therapy whilst awaiting specialist assessment, in particular “bridging hormones”. We recognise that there is currently inadequate provision for patients with waiting times in excess of 24 months for initial NHS appointments. However, it is our practice policy that confirmation of diagnosis and commencement of initial hormonal treatment for gender incongruence should be made by a specialist gender identity service in all cases.

[**Please see the shared care agreement section of our website for more detail.**](https://bournbrookvarsitymedical.co.uk/shared-care-prescribing)

We recognise that GPs are most often the first point of contact within the health care system for patients with gender dysphoria. This is a huge responsibility that we take very seriously. The clinical team at the University Medical Practice will:

* Make the initial referral to the specialist gender identity clinic. We will do this referral as rapidly as possible and take into account your preferences as well as waiting times when choosing a clinic.
* Prescribe hormones (and monitor treatment) following the initiation and ongoing recommendation of an NHS specialist gender identity clinic. This will be as part of a shared care agreement with the specialist endocrinologist, who will offer ongoing support. We are unable to prescribe hormones in any other circumstances.
* Provide support to maintain your mental and physical health. We recognise that accessing specialist clinics can be frustrating and waiting times are long. We can provide mental health support at the surgery by offering advice on self help strategies, treating anxiety and depression (including with medication if appropriate), referring to local NHS mental health services, and sign-posting to other support services if needed.

We recognise there is guidance from the Royal College of Psychiatrists and other organisations that GPs “may prescribe ‘bridging’ endocrine treatments as part of a holding and harm reduction strategy while the patient awaits specialised endocrinology or other gender identity treatment” particularly if patients are already taking hormones from illicit sources. However, we are not experienced in initiating hormonal treatments for gender dysphoria and do not feel able to provide “bridging hormones” safely in any circumstance.

Unfortunately, the appropriate support is just not currently available for us to do this. It should be recognised that all the NHS gender identity clinics only initiate hormonal treatment after a number of investigations and input from a specialist team of psychiatrists, endocrinologists, and psychologists. This includes counselling on the side effects and potential long term risks of hormonal treatment. It is not realistic that the same level of support could safely be provided within our practice.