Ethical dilemmas in gender surgery

Friday, 12th April - 14:00: WS 2: Ethical dilemmas in gender surgery (Bramante 8)

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Background
Over the past decade, the conceptualization of the concept of “gender” has shifted rather strongly from a dichotomous view of man/woman as a binary to a more continuous concept of each person possessing both masculine and feminine characteristics in varying degrees. As a result of these more continuous views, health care providers acknowledge more often individual differences in (gender-)identity development and treatment requests. Subsequently they are willing to support the unique paths individuals may take to one’s hoped for goals and outcomes may or may not have included different medical interventions, and to offer accessible and flexible affirmative non-stigmatizing health care. This flexible approach to treatment requests, following changes in diagnostic criteria (ICD-11), societal changes, changes of law in European countries, can be challenging for health care professionals. In principal health care professionals follow the fundamentals of medicine and the Hippocrates oath: “Practice two things in your dealings with disease: either help or do not harm the patient”. When it comes to surgery, the surgeon must trust, more than before, on the patient itself and the health care professionals concerned with the gender incongruent individual prior to the surgical consultation, when it comes to possible risks and gains of surgery. In order to “help”, the surgeon must fully understand what treatment is desired. In order to “do no harm”, the expectations and underlying motives of the individual in relation to the wished for treatment should be explored thoroughly.

Methods
Aim of this workshop:
In a period when there are many innovations in surgical policies regarding the treatment of gender incongruence and a shift toward more shared decision making between patients and surgeons, we are aiming at (1) facilitating a dialogue between health professionals on the impact of these trends on how they handle (a)typical surgical request and (2) clarifying the criteria that are used by surgeons and other health professionals to accept or reject (a)typical requests. Finally, we are hoping that health care professionals participating in the workshop afterwards feel more empowered when encountering diverse treatment requests of gender incongruent individuals.

Questions addressed during the workshop:
What diverse treatment requests did you come across?
Do these requests form an ethical dilemma?
What is your approach when it comes to atypical requests?
How do you handle treatment requests that transgress your professional boundaries?
Is there a need to draw a line for accepting or rejecting surgical requests? Per clinic? Per country? European? Worldwide?
If there is a need to draw a line, where should we draw it?
Method:
In an era of more acceptance of gender diversity and gender incongruence, we want to discuss these (ethical) questions in an interactive interdisciplinary workshop. Led by experts in the field of transgender health care. The workshop will use clinical cases as a starting point. Depending on people count this can be done in smaller groups or en-group.

Results and Conclusions
Will follow from this workshop.