

It is estimated that there are at present 30,000 trans-sexuals in this country. About 140 men and 80 women have had sex-change operations, mostly at Charing Cross Hospital where there is a Gender Identity Clinic. Leading psychiatrists maintain that trans-sexualism is most probably due to early conditioning, rather than as a result of a chromosome aberration or genetic defect. GPs should be aware that symptoms begin very early in a child's life, and that, should a doctor notice a child is showing signs of becoming identified with the female role, he may be able to discuss it directly with the mother and prevent the development of the situation.

Surgery for male trans-sexuals is complicated. The penis and testicles are removed, the skin of the penis being conserved and also the skin of the scrotum. A cleft is made between the bladder in front and the rectum (the end of the large bowel) behind. The skin of the penis is then used to line the front wall and the skin of the scrotum is used to line the back wall of the "vagina" so formed. Some of the scrotal skin is also used to construct an imitation of the external female genital organs. The artificial vagina enables a male to have intercourse with another male and some patients claim that they reach a "climax" in sexual relations.

It is also possible to construct artificial breasts by the implantation of plastic bags containing silicone fluid under the skin of the chest behind the nipples. Other procedures include plastic surgery to the face and head. The pitch of the voice can be raised by shortening the vocal chords, and the Adam's apple can also be reduced in size.

The once-a-week evening class for Speech Therapy, Beauty, Grooming and Behaviour Therapy is the only one of its kind in the country and is in its fifth year. It is held in Hampstead, under the auspices of the ILEA and the Camden Institute and has two resident tutors—Marie Chatterley, ex-actress and speech therapist, and our writer, Jill Lawson, who have 10 referred patients for about 13 weeks, or longer if necessary, to help with raising the pitch of the voice and improving mannerisms of speech and deportment, make-up, hair and wig care, wardrobe discussion and all aspects of behaviour to help them adjust to life as a woman.

For the female trans-sexual the breasts can be removed. Although the menstrual periods can, of course, be suppressed by the Pill or male hormones, there are some disadvantages in such treatment. These problems can be avoided by the removal of the uterus or the ovaries. The formation of an artificial penis presents great difficulties and no completely satisfactory solution to this problem has been devised yet.

If you wish to contact the Gender Identity Clinic, write to: Woman's World, 27 Newman Street, London W1P 3PE. All letters will be forwarded.