

18th December 2020

Regarding the High Court Judgement in *Bell v Tavistock*

To our membership and other interested parties,

Many of you will be aware of the judgement passed in the High Court on 1st December 2020 in the case of *Bell v Tavistock*. This judicial review concluded that GnRH agonist medication, commonly known as puberty blockers, may no longer be prescribed for children under 16 years of age without specific authorisation of the court. We, the Executive Committee of GLADD – The Association of LGBTQ+ Doctors and Dentists, have reflected extensively on this judgement and find some aspects concerning. As a community of LGBTQ+ clinicians, many of us feel both a personal and professional apprehension regarding this outcome and its implications for young trans people in this country.

Firstly, we have concerns for the safety and wellbeing of patients currently taking puberty blocking medication, who now face profound uncertainty about their access to this treatment, and the possibility of its imminent cessation. The threat of abrupt removal of what many young trans people feel to be a cornerstone of their care may pose an immediate risk to their mental health, which must be considered in arrangement of immediate services and support for them.

Secondly, accessing gender identity services in the NHS is already onerous. Almost 70% of adult trans people report that waiting times for accessing gender identity services are too long, and this process is unfortunately even harder for young trans people¹. The Gender Identity Development Service has stopped reporting waiting times but is currently seeing patients for their first appointment who were referred to the service in 2018.² We have concerns that the addition of a potentially lengthy legal process may leave young trans people in a state of stress and uncertainty.

Thirdly, we have concerns about the inadequate representation of trans and non-binary individuals within the decision-making process regarding a fundamental aspect of their healthcare. Very few trans and non-binary voices appear to have been involved in a discussion that will define the healthcare of their communities, in a manner that seems paternalistic.

Clinicians make assessments of capacity every day in many varied contexts, and some of these can be exceedingly difficult. We agree that improving culture in healthcare regarding patient autonomy, clinician learning and systems improvements should continue, with the aim of improving the state of healthcare for young trans people. However, as a collective of healthcare professionals and LGBTQ+ activists, we fear that there may be consequences to this ruling which will inadvertently worsen the state of healthcare for young trans people in this country.

We urge the courts and involved clinicians to work together and take responsibility to ensure that any delays to young trans people undergoing this process are minimised so as to reduce the burden of additional distress. We will be reaching out to our trans members, in order to better inform our efforts in activism to improve trans healthcare in this county; and we would encourage the courts to take a similar stance, discussing with young trans people the implications that this will have on their healthcare.

There is a paucity of high-quality evidence available in this field, and to improve the health inequalities faced by the trans community we encourage our colleagues outside of GLADD to prioritise more high-quality, robust studies to improve the state of gender identity healthcare. We eagerly await the outcome of the Independent Review of The Gender Identity Development Service by Dr Hilary Cass, which we believe will support the case for an improved evidence-based service.

Finally, we would like to stress to the young people who are affected by this ruling that there are many skilled healthcare professionals across the country who are able to provide support to you, if you need it. Please do not feel alone.

Yours Faithfully,



Dr Duncan McGregor
Co-Chair, GLADD – The Association of LGBTQ+ Doctors and Dentists
On behalf of the GLADD Executive Committee

1. Government Equalities Office. *National LGBT Survey: Research report*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-lgbt-survey-summary-report> (2018).
2. How long is the wait for a first appointment at GIDS? | GIDS. <https://gids.nhs.uk/how-long-wait-first-appointment-gids>.