GP Letter Final

Dear ,

You may be aware of a High Court ruling on 1st December 2020 in the case *Bell v Tavistock*. The judgment means that children and young people may be unable to consent to puberty-blocking treatment, and that an application to the Court may be required for such treatment to continue. Links to the full judgment and to NHS England’s revised service specifications are at the end of this letter.

This will be unsettling news for our patients who will have many questions about what this means for their care and treatment. You may well also have questions both about what this means for the support your patients will be able to access and the treatments you are able to prescribe. In this letter we will describe what the ruling may mean for **patients currently on treatment. In all cases the key message is that there are no immediate plans to stop treatment with puberty blockers or cross sex hormones.**

The ruling does not impact on the psychological and psychosocial care that is provided in relation to gender by the Gender Identity Development Service. This will continue to be available to your patients and their families.

**If the patient is over 18, this judgment will not apply to them.**

# What does this mean for treatment with puberty blockers?

## If your patient is under 16 years old and currently receiving puberty blockers

**Access to medication will not be automatically withdrawn.**

The University College London Hospitals / Leeds Teaching Hospitals teams and the Gender Identity Development Service at the Tavistock and Portman will conduct clinical reviews of current endocrinology cases, working with young people and their parents/carers to make sure they fully understand the treatment. These clinical reviews will start in early 2021 and patients will be contacted directly to arrange these in due course.

The purpose of the clinical review is for us to decide, together with patients, whether a continuation of puberty blockers is in their “best interests”. If that is what we conclude, and if patients and carers agree with that conclusion, we will apply to the Court to obtain best interests assessments about the continuation of treatment. We have let patients know that **they** **will continue to receive their medication until the outcome of this application to the Court is known.** This has been agreed with NHS England and we are seeking a further stay on the judgement to cover this specific cohort of patients for this specific purpose. It is expected that GPs will continue to prescribe to this cohort. If you have any questions about this, please contact us directly.

Alternatively, if patients decide that they do not want to continue with puberty blockers, or if we decide through our clinical review with them that it is not in their best interest to continue with puberty blockers, we will agree a timeframe for withdrawing medication in a clinically safe way without the need for a Court order. **In this case, medication will not be stopped immediately but will be withdrawn in the safest possible way.** . Where this is the case we will contact you if you are the prescriber / administrator to explain specific next steps in each case.

## If your patients is aged 16 or 17 years and currently receiving puberty blockers and / or cross sex hormones

The Court ruled that young people who are aged 16 or 17 years are more likely to be able to give informed consent, because they are more likely to understand the issues. Therefore, a Court order may not be necessary for them to continue to receive puberty blockers or cross sex hormones.

We will still carry out a clinical review of each case, working with patients and parents/carers to make sure that they fully understand the treatment and any side effects. If there is any doubt between us and them about what is in the patient’s best interests we will consider an application to the Court for a best interests order. **Again, their medication will continue until the outcome of this application to the Court is known.**

# Where to go for further information

There has been a lot of information published online since the ruling. Unfortunately, much of it is speculative and unhelpful. We encourage you to visit [**https://gids.nhs.uk**](https://gids.nhs.uk) regularly for up-to-date and accurate information.

We are contacting individual patients as quickly as we can – please bear with us while we do this. If you would like to speak to someone in our clinical team, please call **07812 512 126** and leave a message. We will get back to you as soon as possible. You can also contact the GIDS psycho-social team by:

* writing to [**gids@tavi-port.nhs.uk**](mailto:gids@tavi-port.nhs.uk) or [**gidsleedsadmin@tavi-port.nhs.uk**](mailto:gidsleedsadmin@tavi-port.nhs.uk)
* calling **020 8938 2030** (London) or **0113 247 1955** (Leeds)

# Managing risk

The uncertainty inherent in this situation is unsettling and anxiety provoking for young people and their families. Most will have waited a long time to be seen by GIDS and may feel disheartened by this judgment and unsure about being able to access the treatment they are seeking. If you feel your patient requires urgent support, and risk management beyond what the national service can offer, please contact the GIDS service as well as making a referral to local CAMHS and flagging the following sources of urgent support:

* If patients need urgent mental health support or advice, as well as making a local referral, please share details with young people, parents and carers of how to access crisis help ([**https://nhs.uk/urgentmentalhealth**](https://nhs.uk/urgentmentalhealth) or texting **SHOUT** to **85258)**
* Helpful mental health and wellbeing advice is also available from the places below:
  + Every Mind Matters for young people and parents/carers  
    [**https://nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters**](https://nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters)
  + Youngminds  
    [**https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help**](https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help)
  + MindEd for Families  
    [**https://mindedforfamilies.org.uk**](https://mindedforfamilies.org.uk)
  + Parents can also call the YoungMinds parents’ helpline:  
    **0808 802 5544**, 9.30am to 4pm on weekdays

# Links to the full judgment and the revised specifications

Judgment:

[**https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Bell-v-Tavistock-Judgment.pdf**](https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Bell-v-Tavistock-Judgment.pdf)

Revised NHS England service specifications:

[**https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Amendment-to-Gender-Identity-Development-Service-Specification-for-Children-and-Adolescents.pdf**](https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Amendment-to-Gender-Identity-Development-Service-Specification-for-Children-and-Adolescents.pdf)

Best wishes