



S.H.E. Social, Health and Empowerment Feminist Collective of Transgender Women of Africa

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Access to gender affirming care: an update from the Eastern Cape, South Africa

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

During September 2013, Social, Health and Empowerment Feminist Collective of Transgender Women of Africa approached the head of the Psychology Unit at the Cecilia Makhiwane Provincial Hospital to discuss a partnership between the NGO and the hospital in order to advance gender affirming care for transgender persons in the Eastern Cape Province.

The conversation was initiated when a masculine transgender identified person sought affirming care through hormones and removal of the breasts. The coordinator of S.H.E approached the Cecilia Makhiwane Hospital to facilitate access to service for transgender persons.

Our proposal was that we would provide the hospital with protocols related to care, including psychosocial support and care protocols. We have worked with the Gender Clinic Staff at Grootte Schuur Hospital to obtain protocols domesticated to the South African context in order to make it easier to train other providers. We did not expect the providers at Cecilia Makhiwane Hospital to do it all on their own, therefore we proposed a partnership. After a long time of sending an initial email, the head of the unit replied that it is a good proposal but they are just too busy within the unit. We wrote to the unit again and made it clear that we are not seeking a special service; we just seek to be a part of the service to which all residents of the Eastern Cape Province are entitled. Having failed to reply on our email, we launched a case with the Commission for Gender Equality in East London, Eastern Cape Province.

The Legal Advisor for the Eastern Cape office of the Commission for Gender Equality have since had a meeting with senior management at the Cecilia Makhiwane Hospital in which the hospital acknowledged the complaint. A follow up meeting will be held to discuss some of the issues tabled at the first meeting. An official from the department of health in the Eastern Cape has also made contact with S.H.E to acknowledge the complaint and to provide the assurance that the matter will be addressed.

Members of the transgender community in the province have welcomed this outcome. "This has been challenging to us to as a community for a really long time. I have wanted to go onto hormones for breast development as part of my gender transition for such a long time. As a community, we commend the work done by S.H.E and the Commission on Gender Equality, particularly the Legal Advisor in the province", says Ms. Ayanda Kwinana, a transgender woman from East London.

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It is highlighted by the Commission for Gender Equality(CGE) , Eastern Cape that it has worked closely with the LGBTI sector within the province with the firm resolve of combating all forms of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity.

CGE's Legal Officer in the Eastern Cape , Ms Kerry Anne Oosthuysen cites that,

"Transgender persons are often victimized and discriminated against based on the prejudice and misunderstanding of society. Simple access to health care in the form of Hormone Replacement Therapy and Psycho Social services can be a horrendous exercise, with Trans persons often being turned away by the public health care sector. Denial of basic rights also extends to the employment sector, with many Transgender persons having to resort to sex work as they are unable to find employment as employers are unable to reconcile the gender identity of the individual with that of his or her physical characteristics. The CGE , Eastern Cape has actively pursued the "trans agenda" by incorporating pertinent information in its outreach campaigns to rural areas . Currently, the CGE is investigating a formal complaint from S.H.E regarding lack of access to medical health care at Cecilia Makiwane".

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