

ELTU 1001 Problem Solution Essay

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Solving the Hormone Shortage Problem of Chinese Transgender Community: Incorporating Basic Medical Insurance, Reducing Hormone Restrictions and Training Professional Physicians

China's economy is developing rapidly, and people's lives are constantly improving. However, transgender people in China still face serious hormone shortage. Transgender individuals are those whose gender identity differs from that recorded at birth (American Psychological Association [APA], 2018). To align their bodies with their gender identity, transgender people may use hormone medications to maintain their body's hormone levels (Chong et al., 2021). However, Chinese officials continue to strengthen supervision and restrictions on the sales of hormones used by transgender people (National Medical Products Administration [NMPA], 2022), raising concerns for the Chinese transgender community. To solve the problem of hormone deficiency among transgender people in China, incorporating basic medical insurance, reducing hormone restrictions, and training professional physicians are possible solutions.

Difficulty in obtaining hormones for transgender in China is worsening. Liu et al. (2020) found that nearly 80% of transgender people in China under investigation “expressed a desire for hormonal therapy” (p. 3), but only 8.9% of them could obtain hormones without difficulty. Another study of trans women in Shanghai also showed that even in China's most developed cities, trans women still have little access to medical care (Wang et al., 2022). Moreover, hormone shortages have spawned many illegal activities. Researchers have indicated that among Chinese transgender hormone users, nearly 70% ever bought hormones from “informal drug dealers” (Liu et al., 2020). Apparently, the hormone shortage problem among transgender people in China is serious and needs to be addressed promptly.

One important factor contributing to the hormone shortage could be the huge economic pressure which China's transgender community is facing. Among the transgender

community, young people account for a large proportion (Chong et al., 2021). These people may face low income and cannot afford expensive hormones. Meanwhile, financial subsidies for hormones used by transgender people are very limited, so most of the consumption could be borne by individuals (Lin et al., 2021). In addition, Liu et al. (2020) also affirmed that “Financially unaffordable” (p. 5) is one of the main factors preventing the transgender community in China from receiving effective care.

Apart from the economic pressure, another cause is that the Chinese government strictly restricts the sale and use of hormone drugs. In December 2022, the Chinese government banned the online sales of cyproterone acetate, a commonly used antiandrogen, and estradiol, a commonly used estrogen (NMPA, 2022). A recent study has reported that if transgender people want to obtain hormone drugs in regular hospitals, they need to go through complicated procedures, including providing “legal documents and medical diagnosis of gender dysphoria” (Lin et al., 2021, p. 1). Due to cumbersome procedures, transgender people in China may not be able to purchase hormones simply because they do not meet one of the conditions, exacerbating this social problem.

Other significant causes include the shortage of doctors with transgender-related expertise. Liu et al. (2020) found that only 7% of Chinese transgender people consult a doctor when taking hormones. Another research also revealed that Chinese undergraduate medical courses rarely include specialized transgender-related knowledge, and most are limited to a superficial introduction (Hana et al., 2021). In the absence of professional doctors, some people could seek illegal means, but more transgender people may have to give up seeking hormone treatment.

Hormone shortages could have serious consequences on both individual and societal levels. Recent research has uncovered that obtaining inferior hormones from informal dealer and taking them without consultation could cause irreversible damage to the body and even lead to death (Zhang, 2023). More seriously, this might result in a large-scale illegal online drug smuggling chain. Researchers also found that inadequate supply of hormones keeps the depression and suicide rates high among transgender community (Liu et al., 2020), which may also cause an increase in violence and crime rates at the social level.

Including the hormones needed by transgender people on the national medical

insurance list may reduce the financial pressure on the transgender community. Tao et al. (2020) suggested that China's health insurance effectively reduced poverty rates for responsible people. In the United States, nearly half of states had legal protections for transgender-related private health insurance as of 2019 (Thoreson, 2020). However, study showed transgender people have lower insurance coverage than cisgender people (Downing et al., 2022), which may place an additional financial burden on them. China's huge medical insurance system could effectively alleviate the personal economic pressure and make expensive hormones more accessible to Chinese transgender people. However, China is a developing country. Including hormones used by transgender people in medical insurance could impose a huge burden on the country's finances.

The drug regulatory authorities in China could ease restrictions on hormone trading and put more emphasis on ensuring drug quality. According to recent research, the government's strict ban not only limits the channels for transgender people to obtain hormones, but also fails to meet expectations of cracking down on inferior drugs (Zhang, 2023). Although the United States have fewer restrictions on hormone purchases than China, there are "screening and testing programs" (Kassotis et al., 2020, p. 1) specifically for estrogen, which reduces the possibility of hormones harming the human body. Loosening restrictions is beneficial for hormone acquisition. However, if the restrictions are lifted in China, transgender people may not receive effective consultation when purchasing and using hormones due to the lack of transgender-related doctors in China (Liu et al., 2020), which may lead to hormone abuse.

Training professional physicians for transgender people could solve the problem from a deeper level. Recent study considered that trained healthcare professionals are an important factor in trans people being able to receive good health care (Koch et al., 2019). Shamen et al. (2020) also advocated that Chinese doctors need an "operational guideline" (p. 14) specifically for transgender people. Meanwhile, researchers have suggested that curricula for medical students could include specific modules on gender identity (Suen & Chan, 2020). It may take a long time to train a professional doctor, which could bring a financial burden to the country. However, once doctors with professional transgender knowledge are trained, many transgender people could go to hospitals directly for diagnosis and appropriate treatment instead of risking purchasing illegal drugs online. This could reduce illegal trade chains, make it easier for transgender people to obtain hormones, ensure the quality of drugs

and avoid hormone abuse.

In conclusion, evidence suggests that transgender people in China are facing severe hormone shortages. Both including related hormones in medical insurance and reducing restrictions on hormone trading could alleviate this problem. However, training transgender-related physicians may be the most fundamental solution. By training specialized doctors, transgender people's access to hormones is guaranteed. This could safeguard the rights and interests of transgender people in China and may also have a positive impact on China's economy and society in the long run.

(word count: 1144 words)

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