Gender-affirming Voice Care

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Disclosure

- None personally

- Spouse:
  - Olympus America Inc. (consultant)
  - Instrumentarium (royalties/holder of intellectual property rights)
  - Freundenberg (consultant)
  - Reflux Gourmet LLC (stock shareholder)
Vocal healthcare team
Ideal for any patient with voice concerns

- Multi-disciplinary
  - Otolaryngologist
  - Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP)
    • Voice-specialized or interested helpful

- Combination of different perspectives and expertise

Transgender voice concerns
History / symptoms are key

- Where is the patient in their transition process?
  - Presenting full time or part time?
    • Friends? Family? Work? Everyone?
    • Important consideration for vocal demands/needs
    • Also for support
  - Working with a team?
    • Primary care? +/- endocrinology?
    • Psychology/psychiatry/therapy/counseling?
    • Other surgeons?
Transgender voice concerns
History / symptoms are key

- What is bothersome about the voice?
  - Pitch
  - Raspiness
  - Vocal fatigue
  - Vocal effort
  - Decreased volume/projection

- What are the vocal demands?
  - Work
  - Social
  - Personal

- Is patient misgendered?
  - What frequency?
  - What circumstances? (e.g. on phone, in person)

- What has the patient tried previously? Was it helpful?
  - YouTube videos
  - Speaking in higher pitch
  - Apps on phone
Patient assessment

- How does the voice sound?
- Head and neck physical exam
  - Areas of neck tenderness and tension?
- Laryngeal exam with **stroboscopy**
  - Evaluate anatomy and vocal fold vibration

- Partner with SLP to assess **stimulability** for change in voice production and teach skills to implement change
  - Identify pts who are appropriate candidates for voice therapy
  - Better adherence to treatment
  - Better voice outcomes
  - Don’t waste time, resources, money

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Litts JK. Laryngoscope. 2015 Sep;125(9):2139-42.

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Treatment options

Gender-affirming voice care

Vocal fold surgery  Voice therapy  Tracheal shave
Factors to be considered in treatment selection

- Pulmonary disease
- Allergies/Sinus
- Reflux
- Dehydration

Treatment recommendations

Voice therapy

- Best with voice specialized SLP
- Focus on pitch
- But also work on other factors which impact voice and perception of gender:
  - intonation, intensity, resonance, articulation, speech rate, language, patterns of speaking, nonverbal communication
  - NOTE: these are not addressed with surgery
Treatment recommendations
Vocal fold surgery

- IF patient has undergone conservative measures AND been compliant AND has persistent issues

- Options: (goal = elevate pitch)
  - Glottoplasty: shortens VF length
  - Cricothyroid approximation: increases VF tension
  - Laser reduction: decreases mass

- Pro tips:
  - Be cautious about proceeding directly to surgery first
  - Be wary of patients who “demand” surgery

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Wendler glottoplasty
Laser

Photos courtesy of Mark Courey MD

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Treatment recommendations
Chondrolaryngoplasty (tracheal shave)

- Goal: remove “Adam’s apple”
- Addresses external appearance

- Should not impact pitch
- Risk of disrupting anterior attachment of vocal folds
  - DISASTER

Summary

- Multidisciplinary approach (OTO + SLP) improves pt care
- Targeted treatment planning based on pt’s goals / needs

- Voice therapy is the optimal treatment to achieve most patients’ voice goals

- Vocal fold surgery much less often needed
  - Permanently alters anatomy
  - Careful pt selection with thorough informed consent

- Chondrolaryngoplasty (tracheal shave) → external appearance
Questions?
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