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Trans clinics warn on rise in regret



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Youth gender clinics in Melbourne and London have acknowledged the possibility of online social contagion being a driver of the exponential increase in teenagers identifying as transgender and seeking hormonal treatment.

In a new paper for the Journal of the American Medical Association, researchers who champion “gender affirming” treatment report a link between 2614 positive trans items in mainstream media from 2009-2016 and new referrals to these two clinics one to three weeks later.

They admit “a lack of evidence” to explain the global surge in patients but suggest media coverage may prompt young people to explore “longstanding feelings of gender diversity” and alert them to treatment for gen-

der dysphoria (distress at feeling “born in the wrong body”).

However, the researchers acknowledge the risk highlighted by critics of the gender-affirming approach that social media “might act as a double-edged sword or a means of social contagion”, making some young people “erroneously come to believe (their) non-specific emotional or bodily distress is due to gender dysphoria and being (trans)”.

The JAMA paper cites historic low rates of treatment regret among former patients but calls for vigilance “to observe whether regret rates increase in the face of greater media attention and more referrals”.

The British government’s Tavistock clinic has reported a 4400 per cent increase in patients born female from 2008-2018, and there has been a 1767 per cent rise in new referrals (55 per cent

female) at the Royal Children’s Hospital clinic in Melbourne from 2012-2019. Similar trends have been reported in other major cities around the world.

Clinical psychologist Dianna Kenny, a former professor at the University of Sydney and a gender affirming critic, said social contagion was an obvious risk.

“Adolescent social contagion has been pretty well irrefutably established in patterns of marijuana use, eating disorders, non-suicidal self-harm and suicide,” she said.

“The point is that adolescents are very susceptible to social contagion because it’s at that stage of the life span that peer influence becomes extremely important.”

Gender affirming clinicians say that children as young as three are “experts” in knowing their innermost “gender identity”, even if it’s at odds with their biological sex.