

---

# Growing Old Transgendered

*By Loree Cook-Daniels*

Are FTMs who have been on testosterone for 30 years more likely to develop blood problems? Are there heart medications they should steer clear of? Is 65 too late to have a phalloplasty?

How comfortable will the partner of 55-year-old, "new FTM" feel in the local support group? What have been others' experiences telling grandchildren that grandma's going to become grandpa? How does one go about using a parent's power of attorney when the name on the paper is "Judy Smith" and you're now "James Smith"?

When it's time to enter a nursing home, who is available to help educate the nurses' aides about how to handle a man with "female" genitals? If the nursing home refuses to accept the new resident, does he have any recourse? Does he have any rights if the nursing home refuses to let him have private time alone with his male spouse?

If most of these questions stump you, you're in good company. Although transgendered persons have always existed, we will be the first generations to reach old age in sufficient numbers to be able to start forging the answers to these (and hundreds of other) aging-related questions.

This past year [1998] American Boyz became the first U.S. transgender organization to begin an organized effort to start answering these questions, by founding the Transgender Aging Network (TAN) and ElderTG. TAN networks and supports the "professionals" (researchers, health care professionals, service providers, advocates, educators, and others) who are interested in transgender aging issues. ElderTG is an e-mail list that networks and supports transsexual, transgender, and intersex persons aged 50 and older, and the SOFFAs involved with such persons.

The range of issues and persons that are of interest to both TAN and ElderTG is huge. There are at least three generations encompassed within the targeted agespan, for instance. One generation, roughly 50 to 65, is still dealing with workforce issues while simultaneously planning retirement, providing eldercare to older relatives, and finishing raising and launching children. The middle generation, approximately 65 to 85, is coping with the challenges of retirement; the loss of loved ones, income, and routines; the threat of isolation; and, possibly, increasing health concerns. The oldest generation, those 85 and older, is concerned about its legacies, arranging for long term care, and making end of life decisions.

Another way of dividing this population is by stage of transition. An FTM transitioning at age 63 has questions quite different from those facing his age peer who transitioned 25 years before, for instance. Yet all those who are aging or who are working with older transgendered persons and SOFFAs share concerns and, more importantly, knowledge and experience that others can use and build upon. Indeed, American Boyz decided that because the issues of transgender aging are so pressing and have been so poorly addressed, TAN and ElderTG would be the first AmBoyz services specifically designed to address MTFs and their issues as well as F2Ms and SOFFAs.

Although both TAN and ElderTG are too new as of this writing to have plans of action, there is no shortage of topics and projects that we could take on. Some of the areas that need work include:

- **Models of transgendered aging.** (It's always helpful to know that others have forged the path in front of you.)
- **Healthy transgender aging.** (What are the implications of long-term hormone use? How does testosterone react when mixed with three or four or six other medications for chronic conditions? Should hormone dosages be reduced once one becomes 60, 70, or 80?)
- **Healthy transgender aging interactions.** (Are the issues and support needs of older transgendered persons and SOFFAs different from those of their younger peers?)
- **System advocacy.** (How do we educate the hundreds of thousands of aging services providers first that transgender elders exist and, then, how to appropriately serve them? Who can help transgendered elders get Medicare to pay for surgery? )
- **Integration into the transgender community.** (Do older transgender persons and SOFFAs feel welcome in existing transgender organizations? Are these organizations meeting their needs?)

TAN, launched during the summer of 1998, has managed to undertake a number of advocacy efforts. In its first few months of existence, TAN:

- Answered a request from SAGE (Senior Action in a Gay Environment – the oldest Lesbian and Gay aging services organization in the country) to assist them in understanding what they'd need to do to incorporate transgender aging issues into their programs. (It's not clear what they've done as a result of this, but we've certainly been circulating copies of that letter!)
- Lobbied the sponsors of a Washington, D.C. conference on Lesbian and Gay aging to include at least a mention of transgendered elders and TAN. (This letter and packet of materials was also sent to Congressman Barney Frank, who was keynoting the conference.)
- Worked with LGAIN, the Lesbian and Gay Aging Interests Network, of the American Society on Aging (the largest professional group in the country concerned with Lesbian and Gay aging) to include transgendered issues on its website and in its newsletter. This work has resulted in a decision to devote a whole edition of their newsletter to transgender aging issues during 1999! TAN will help plan, write, and distribute this newsletter.
- Advocated that the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) expand its public policy paper on "LGBT" aging issues to actually include information on transgender aging public policy issues.

Although organizations concerned with Lesbian and Gay aging issues may be the most likely to also begin looking at transgender aging issues, they are certainly not the only ones TAN members are working with. For instance, one TAN member has been including transgender aging issues in workshops she gives nationally to adult protective services and aging services professionals. Another has begun including "out" transgendered elders in a traveling photography and essays exhibit she has created. Future plans include developing a website with resources relevant to transgender aging topics, and sponsoring a regular newsletter.

If you are interested in transgendered aging issues, we encourage you to join either (or both) TAN or ElderTG. To join ElderTG, e-mail moderator Loree Cook-Daniels (LoreeCD@aol.com) a short message explaining who you are and why you are interested in ElderTG. TAN's sole membership requirement is that every member answer the following short questionnaire to facilitate networking among members. Answers can be e-mailed, faxed or snail-mailed per instructions at the end of the questions. Those requesting additional information about either TAN or ElderTG should also direct their questions or requests to Loree Cook-Daniels via any of the means below.

## Transgender Aging Network: Member Questionnaire

What is your involvement with transgendered elders/aging? (Are you serving elders; researching elders; or involved in transgender groups?) If so, please describe fully. (Add more pages and/or attachments if desired.)

To what organization(s) related to transgender, aging, health, and related topics do you belong?

Organization -----

Your Role(s) -----

What are you seeking concerning transgender aging topics, resources, assistance, etc.? I.e., what might other network participants provide you or help you with? (Please be as specific as possible.)

What publications/resources can you provide to others interested in transgender aging topics?

Aside from sharing the results of this questionnaire, what would you like to see this network do?

6. What else should we have asked/would you like to share?

Your contact info: (Please print clearly!)

Name: -----

Title: -----

Organization: -----

Address: -----

Phone(s): -----

Fax: -----

Email/URL: -----

Please return this questionnaire to:  
Loree Cook-Daniels  
FORGE: Transgender Aging Network  
PO Box 1272  
Milwaukee, WI 53201  
Voice: 414-559-2123  
Fax: 414-540-6489  
Email: LoreeCD@aol.com