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Complex Preparation

Precedes Sex Change Surgery



Dr. Donald R. Laub

By Howard Miller

The role of the surgeon in anatomically changing an individual into the opposite sex comes only after a long and complex process of psychological change, Dr. Donald R. Laub, chief of the division of Plastic Surgery at Stanford University Medical Center said Tuesday evening.

"Long before the actual surgical change," Dr. Laub said, "the individual has lived and worked and thought and been accepted as a member of that sex for from one to three years.

"He or she has shown that he or she can live in that fashion and be a productive, well-adjusted member of society."

Dr. Laub addressed members of the Fresno Medical Society in the Ramada Inn on the rehabilitation program for individuals seeking sex change. He spoke in an interview prior to the meeting.

About 100 such surgical changes have been effected in Stanford hospital since 1967, Dr. Laub said. It is estimated about one person in 100,000 feels born into the wrong sex.

"We are not talking about the transvestite (one addicted to wearing clothing of the opposite sex) or the homosexual," Dr. Laub said. We are talking about the person anatomically perfectly male or female but who feels imprisoned in the wrong sex."

It is theorized that such a thing happens during the very early time of pregnancy. The developing embryo may be male but a dosage of female hormones may implant the feeling of being female or vice versa.

And there is no way to turn these unfortunates around sychologically or psychiatrically, Dr. Laub said. It is a lifetime thing.

An individual is not accepted lightly for a sex change. Dr. Laub said. He or she must live up to three years in the chosen role. If a man, for instance, he must live and work as a woman, associate with other women as another woman.

During this period he is given hormones to feminize him; electrolysis to

diminish facial hair and psychological preparation for the new life.

The actual surgical change takes about four hours, Dr. Laub said.

Dr. Laub said turning a female into a male is not too satisfactory and the patient frequently feels a sense of frustration.

Cosmetic surgery follows, breasts augmented for the new female, breasts removed from the new male. The entire procedure requires about one week in the hospital.

There have been a few cases he knows of, he said, where the individual deeply regrets having gone through this even after the long preparatory period.

"Unfortunately," he said, "it is ir-

After an individual has had such a change, Dr. Laub said, it is best for him or her to vanish from the previous life and "surface somewhere else, putting behind all thoughts and obligations of the previous life."

As a physician and surgeon, how does Dr. Laub view this drastic action?

"It's repugnant," he said. "It is certainly nothing we are advocating. Nor are we advocating society to be more liberal.

"An individual is accepted for this only in the case of very severe problems and the objective is to fit the person into society in a sound, productive role."