

SURGERY NAVIGATION PROCESS

CalLEN-LORDE

Callen-Lorde has been helping Transgender and Non-Binary (TGNB) patients navigate access to gender affirming surgery for many years. The process for requesting letters of support has changed due to the increased demand for surgery letters as well as our concerns for how our patients are healing after surgery.

Increased Demand

In 2019, almost 1/3 of Callen-Lorde's patients were TGNB identified and more than 800 patients asked for surgery letters. This number continues to grow and many patients are requesting letters for multiple procedures. Our systems have also been affected by COVID-19. When NYC hospitals reopened in June 2020, we saw a **216% increase in letter requests** - more than twice the number of requests we saw in the same time period last year! As the number of Callen-Lorde patients in need of surgery letters continues to grow, we're changing our process to protect patient's health and safety. We are spending a little more time getting to know each patient to understand their needs and to ensure they have the most affirming experience possible.

How do I access surgery as a Callen-Lorde patient?

Callen-Lorde does not provide gender affirming surgery for patients, but we can help you navigate the process, including:

- Finding a surgeon
- Insurance navigation
- Information about surgical procedures
- Care planning for your upcoming surgery
- Support letters from your PCP and mental health providers for insurance coverage

The first step to navigating the surgery process as a Callen-Lorde patient is to talk to a Case Manager or your Primary Care Provider (PCP). You can speak with the front desk in order to talk to a case manager or your PCP or call 646-965-5463 and leave a message.

Making the Request: Consult or Surgery Date?

There are two types of letters we provide at Callen-Lorde - Consultation Letters and Surgery Letters.

- **Consultation Letters** can help you secure a date for a consultation and/or surgery. This is a note for your surgeon to let them know that we support your surgery planning and education.
- **Surgery Letters** will be written after you are scheduled for surgery in order to confirm your medical health and to get insurance approval for your procedure.

How long will it take for me to get my letters?

This can depend on a lot of variables.

Generally, it takes about 4-6 weeks from the first request for letters until they are sent to your surgeon's office. For this reason, we recommend requesting your surgery letters at least **3 months before** your consultation or surgery date. There may be unexpected delays and we do not want your plans to be altered.

What if I feel like it's been taking too long for me to get my surgery letters?

We know sometimes it can feel this way! The process of navigating gender affirming surgery requires a lot of patience. We are doing everything we can to get your letters to you as quickly as possible.

- If it has been 4 weeks without hearing from us, please contact our Care Coordination department at 646-965-5463 or send a patient portal message.

- Last minute requests for letters are handled on a case-by-case basis. We understand that surgery dates are flexible and may change due to cancellations or changes in a surgeon's schedule, but unfortunately, we cannot accommodate these requests.

Surgeries that are booked within a month of your letter request cannot be fulfilled.

How to get letters of support for surgery:

- 1. Speak with a case manager** to fill out a Surgery Screener. Let them know if you need a letter for a consultation or if it's to book a surgery date.
- 2. Meet with your PCP** to discuss the medical details of your surgery and to request a letter. Let them know if this is for a consult or if it's to book a surgery date.
- 3. If this is for a consult;** 2-4 weeks after completing the screener you will get a phone call from the mental health department to schedule an appointment with a therapist.
- 4. If this is to schedule a date for surgery;** 4-6 weeks after completing the screener you will receive a call to schedule a Surgery Care Plan with a member of the TGNB Health Team. Your Surgery Care Plan is needed to access support letters.
- 5. Surgery Education** is available if you need more information about the procedure to learn the risks and benefits of your surgery.
- 6. Meet with a therapist and/or psychiatrist.** After the Care Plan is complete, you will receive an appointment with the behavioral health provider(s) you will need for your surgery. The list of patients in need of behavioral health letters is sent out once per week.

Once all of your letters are complete, the letters will be sent directly to your surgeon. You can request your own copies as well.

What happens at each appointment?

- **Case Manager (CM) Meeting:** the CM will help you start the process of getting your letters.
 - ✓ Make sure you know the name of your surgeon, your desired procedure, and your current health insurance information.
 - ✓ You will receive information about options for patient education
- **Surgery Care Plan:** the TGNB Health team will discuss you learned during your consultation, how you are preparing for recovery, and who your caregiver(s) will be. We will also check in with you about COVID-19 protocols and how to keep you and your caregivers safe as you heal.
- **PCP appointment:** you will discuss your desired procedure with your PCP and go over any relevant health information before your consultation and/or surgery. You will also get your labs done during your pre-op visit - usually a few weeks before surgery.
- **Behavioral Health (Therapist/Psychiatrist) Appointment:** the Behavioral Health Provider you meet with will ask you questions about your desired surgery and your care plan - including your caregiver(s), managing stress around surgery, and more.

What if I miss my appointment?

If you miss an appointment with your PCP or therapist, call back as soon as you can to reschedule. We will offer you the soonest available appointment, but you will not be able to skip the line.

TIP: Make sure you empty your voicemail box so that we can leave a message. Set an alarm or reminder for your appointments. And don't forget to add these appointments to your calendar! These tips can help you remember these important meetings with your providers.

Resources

Check out the Callen-Lorde TransAtlas for a list of community resources and surgeons that perform gender-affirming procedures in NYC! <https://transatlas.callen-lorde.org/>