

National Endowment for Plastic Surgery Grant

From funding to groundbreaking research on gender transitioning

By Jim Leonardo

Editor's note: The following is part of an ongoing series highlighting The PSF Research Grant Award winners, and research they're conducting to improve patient safety and develop new technologies for plastic surgeons. These features examine research funding awarded prior to the current year, as projects to which grants were awarded this year may not yet have results ready to discuss.

THE RESEARCHER

Anne Klassen, DPhil

Title: Professor of Pediatrics, McMaster University Faculty of Health Sciences, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

Award: National Endowment for Plastic Surgery Grant
Project: Developing the GENDER-Q to Measure Outcomes for Gender-Affirming Treatment

PSN: *What are you measuring in this study?*

Dr. Klassen: The name of this outcome measure was recently changed from TRANS-Q to GENDER-Q, as we hope it will be used to evaluate outcomes for people of any gender seeking any form of gender-affirming treatment(s). The GENDER-Q is a type of questionnaire known as a patient-reported outcome measure (PROM). One of the barriers to outcome assessment in gender-affirming healthcare to date is the lack of a specific PROM designed to evaluate treatment outcomes from the patient perspective. The GENDER-Q will provide a comprehensive set of independently functioning scales that will cover concepts such as appearance, body image, sexual and psychosocial well-being. This modular approach will make it possible for researchers and clinicians to use a subset of scales based on specific research questions or clinical need.

PSN: *How far along is the research?*

Dr. Klassen: The PSF grant funded a Canada-U.S. qualitative study. Our aim is to interview 50 people age 16 years and older who are seeking or have had hormonal and/or surgical treatments. Each interview will be transcribed and coded line-by-line. The analysis will result in a conceptual framework covering concepts of interest to patients and an item pool to inform scale development. The scales will then be refined through patient and healthcare provider input to ensure they have content validity (i.e., content is relevant, comprehensive and comprehensible). We've just completed our 28th interview; we're learning a lot, but PSN should check back in six months to learn what we have pieced together.

PSN: *What do you see as the practical applicability of this research?*

Dr. Klassen: The practical application of our work will be to provide clinicians and researchers around the world with a comprehensive set of independently functioning scales they can use in clinical practice for shared decision-making, and in comparative effectiveness research to improve treatments.

PSN: *Has anything unexpected surfaced thus far?*

Dr. Klassen: Yes, indeed. First, while PROMs



Trisia Breitkopf (left), Anna Miroshnychenko and Shelby Diebert near their poster at the McMaster University Department of Pediatrics' 50th anniversary celebration (Not pictured is Manraj Kaur, who Dr. Klassen notes is highly important to the project); and (inset) Dr. Klassen with her husband, Norm.



PSN: *What kind of sounds are most commonly heard in your lab?*

Dr. Klassen: The sounds of people eating chocolate, candies and/or other sugary things; my team needs a lot of snacks!

PSN: *How do you spend your time away from the lab?*

Dr. Klassen: I've been married to an amazing man for 30 years in August. My husband is a professor of Medieval English literature (Chaucer is his guy). We have three adult sons – ages 25, 23 and 20 – who are working or still in university. Now that the busyness of raising a family has settled down, I love to travel with my husband – especially in Europe.

We also like watching movies and reading novels. I've always been a runner (though not fast or far), and about five years ago I started doing yoga (I wish I had taken that up a lot earlier). I'm a lifelong Scrabble player, and I've just started knitting again after a 20-year hiatus.

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are typically developed in a single language and often in a single country, the optimal design is to develop from the outset a PROM in a cross-cultural manner. Early in our research, we were approached by research teams in Denmark and the Netherlands that were keen to collaborate. These teams have gone on to conduct 33 interviews that have been translated into English, and we'll be adding their data into the mix.

Second, I was just awarded a \$2 million Foundation Grant from the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR). This grant ensures that our team can complete the development of the GENDER-Q and advance a program of transgender health research. I know I wouldn't have been successful in the CIHR competition without the support we received from The PSF to begin the Phase 1 study and have pilot data to include. For this reason, I want to sincerely thank The PSF for supporting our research.

An important change taking place in health care is the uptake of PROMs in clinical care, health services, quality improvement initiatives, performance measurement and comparative effectiveness research. It's no longer enough to simply count how many people died or survived a hospital admission or had a complication.

Today it's important to also measure outcomes that matter to patients from their perspective. In plastic and reconstructive surgery, our team has been working in this space – and we've developed a series of PROMs (qportfolio.org) that have been translated into numerous languages and are now used around worldwide (more than 3,500 licensed users).

PSN: *Who are your mentors and key collaborators on this work?*

Dr. Klassen: There are many people involved the GENDER-Q research who warrant being thanked. This project really started because numerous people providing gender-affirming healthcare contacted us to ask if we would prioritize developing a PROM they could use. I'm very grateful for my co-investigators (Natasha Johnson, MD; Giancarlo McEvenue, MD; Shane Morrison, MD; Thomas Satterwhite, MD; John

Semple, MD) and patient partners (Will Rowe and Kinu Savard), whose input on the study is indispensable.

I would like to acknowledge my co-developer, The PSF immediate-past President Andrea Pusic, MD, MHS. Our collaboration now spans 15 years and involves working together on numerous grants, publications, conference presentations and workshops. It's such a pleasure to collaborate with someone so completely committed to her patients and to advancing outcomes research in plastic surgery. I also want to give a huge shout-out to my fantastic research team at McMaster University – Manraj Kaur, Shelby Diebert, Trisia Breitkopf and Charlene Rae. They are the best!

PSN: *What did you want to be when you grew up?*

Dr. Klassen: Well, I definitely did not envision myself as an academic. My parents are from Liverpool, my dad fought in World War II, then he married my mom and they had two children. Then they moved to Canada and proceeded to have five more children (I'm the sixth-born). Neither of my parents finished school, nor did several of my siblings. So I'm an anomaly, as I went on to do a doctorate at the University of Oxford.

In high school, I had some inspiring teachers, and something in me made me want to go to university. I took a few psychology courses, because I wasn't sure what to major in, and then I found my niche. I loved doing research. After that, I just kept following the open door and have had an amazing career to date!

PSN: *What has been your most successful scientific or research project to date?*

Dr. Klassen: My doctoral thesis was one of the first studies to measure health-related quality of life in people having cosmetic and plastic surgery. I was really proud of the fact that I was able to publish a paper from my thesis research in the *British Medical Journal*. It was titled "Should breast reduction surgery be rationed? A comparison of the health status of patients before and after treatment: postal questionnaire survey." That paper was published in 1996.

2020 research grant opportunities available



THE PLASTIC SURGERY FOUNDATION™

The 2020 PSF Investigator-Initiated Grants Cycle is now open. A variety of grants are available – including combined grants supported by collaborations with sister societies – that address specialty areas of research in hand surgery, peripheral nerve, maxillofacial, reconstructive, microsurgery, pediatric plastic surgery, education and more.

Combined grants supported by The PSF and the following organizations – AAHS, AAPPS, AAPS, ACAPS, ASMS, ASPN, ASRM, PSRC and ASE – are available. New opportunities being offered include grants up to \$100,000 on allograft tissue research (funded by MTF Biologics), and The PSF Translational Research Grant.

The PSF also continues to offer several research and training grant opportunities, such as a pilot research grant, National Endowment for Plastic Surgery (NEPS) grants and Research Fellowship grants. Applications for the 2020 cycle are due Dec. 3. Visit the-psf.org/research/grants-program for more information and to apply. **PSN**