

# A blonde locked up with 1,500 men in the Scrubs

Andrew Veitch investigates the case of the man who is changing into a woman, yet whose situation is ignored by the prison authorities

LINDA GOLD was a West End nightclub hostess — short, blonde, in her early twenties and, said her friends, attractive in a Rubenesque sort of way. She's now in Wormwood Scrubs with 1,500 men.

Linda is a transsexual: she has been living as a woman for five years and has been taking artificial oestrogen under prescription from a private doctor for about the same period. She has breasts, smooth skin, fine hair. But she has not undergone the final operation that would make her a woman. Thus, when she was convicted of theft in May and gaoled for 18 months, she was despatched to a male prison.

The medical officer at Wormwood Scrubs has declined to continue the prescription of female hormones. So after five years of womanhood, Linda Gold is now turning back into a man.

Her probation officer

referred her case to the National Council for Civil Liberties, and the council's Roz Kaveney describes what is happening to her: "She's got a lot of oestrogen in her — four or five years is the average time a transsexual would be required to take the hormone before a doctor would operate — so the return of male characteristics will be fairly slow. But gradually the breasts will shrink, the skin will roughen, the capacity to have an erection and ejaculate will return, body hair will return, and facial hair will become bristly.

"She's in a single cell, and while there is still the possibility of harassment, she's a tough Yorkshire girl, a miner's daughter from Wakefield, and she can give as good as she gets. But she's very depressed. She can feel her body changing day by day."

The NCCL wrote to the governor of Wormwood

Scrubs, and to the Prison Department in September pointing out that rehabilitation would be far easier if Linda were allowed to continue in her female role, that it seemed pointlessly cruel to force her to reacquire male secondary characteristics, and asking him to intervene.

The governor replied: "The principal medical officer informs me that in his opinion there are no clinical indications for prescribing oestrogens for this man. He does not consider it necessary to prescribe any treatment."

Meanwhile Linda's probation officer sought an opinion from Dr Limentani, then a consultant psychiatrist at the Portman Clinic in North London. He wrote: "There was never any doubt in my mind that Ms Gold was in a very distressed state of mind . . . it is most likely to be extraordinarily disturbing."

The Prison Department replied that it was the responsibility of the prison medical officer to decide whether it was in the patient's interest to receive a specific treatment, and that there were special hazards in the use of female sex hormones. The letter continued: "your client does not suffer from any of the medical conditions for which female hormones are clinically indicated."

Dr Peter Faridian, who had been treating Linda Gold before she went to gaol, refused to comment to the Guardian: "I shall discuss it with the proper authorities," he said.

In fact no prison medical officer will prescribe the treatment because of the possible side effects. A Home Office spokesman said: "In the clinical judgment of the medical staff, this is a hazardous treatment for any prisoner."

Roz Kaveney points out that the National Health Service authorises the use of hormones for treating the recognised condition of transsexualism, but she admits there are risks: hypertension, blood clots, possibly cancer. Meanwhile she wants the Home Office to reconsider its policy of putting male transsexuals in male prisons. She estimates there are two or three in every London gaol, and there are obvious sexual dangers. However, she agrees there might be quite as many problems in sending them to female prisons.

For all that, it seems less than constructive to deny Linda Gold the medically approved treatment she was receiving before she went to gaol, to lessen her chances of coping with society when she gets out of gaol, and to punish her twice by trying to make a man of her.