



Meredith Temple-Smith

Making Health History Downunder – The Role of Anatomy

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In Australia, rates of labiaplasty have surged over the last two decades. This female genital surgical procedure involves cutting back the labia minora so that they are hidden from view, creating an idealised vulval appearance often likened to Barbie Doll.

Labiaplasty is most commonly performed by cosmetic surgeons, whose advertising wrongly suggests that women with labiaminora protruding beyond their labia majora are abnormal. A GP referral is commonly needed for these specialists. At a GP education event, a GP recounted a consultation where a young female patient requested a referral for labiaplasty. This anecdote began a chain of events which is making history. I invited collaboration from a medical colleague who taught anatomy to supervise 2 medical student projects: one to examine young women's and one to examine medical practitioners' views of labiaplasty. The results encouraged my colleague to undertake a PhD. She explored whether what is normal for female genital anatomy had been established in the scientific literature (it had, diversity is normal, surgical "correction" to an ideal appearance is a social phenomenon); whether that information is included in standard anatomy texts (it isn't) and current medical anatomy teaching on the topic (through interviews with Australian anatomy lecturers). Thirty years ago, it was less important for anatomy resources and teaching to include genital diversity but the labiaplasty industry has created an imperative for change - to maintain connectedness with contemporary issues facing the student population, their future patient population and clinical colleagues. This work has resulted in a change in text and images in Gray's

Anatomy, work by the International Federation of Anatomy Associations (IFAA), and will be featured in an upcoming exhibition at the State Library of Victoria.