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First penis transplants in US planned for wounded veterans



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A young veteran injured in Afghanistan could soon become the first penis transplant recipient in the United States. Johns Hopkins University has given doctors permission to perform 60 penis transplants – all on servicemen whose genitals were injured in combat – and the hospital is nearly ready to put its first potential recipient on the transplant waiting list, [The New York Times](#)

reported.

There were 1,367 servicemen whose penises or testicles were injured in Iraq or Afghanistan from 2001 to 2013, the Times reported, citing Department of Defense statistics. Most were injured by improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and nearly all were younger than 35. While a genital injury may not be publicly visible or life-threatening, experts say, it comes with a big impact.

“If you meet these people, you see how important it is. To be missing the penis and parts of the scrotum is devastating,” Dr. Richard J. Redett, director of pediatric plastic and reconstructive surgery at Johns Hopkins, told the Times. “That part of the body is so strongly associated with your sense of self and identity as a male. These guys have given everything they have.”

“These are young men who have been serving their country overseas,” Dr. Damon Cooney, assistant professor of plastic and reconstructive surgery at Johns Hopkins, [said to CBS News](#). “They may not have a family. They may have been putting that off for when they come home. And typically they’re proud of their body and their masculinity and if that’s destroyed, it can be psychologically devastating.”

These injuries, which are known as urogenital trauma, have been a bigger problem in Afghanistan and Iraq than in previous wars because of things like IED explosions, Dr. Joseph Alukal, director of male reproductive health at New York University’s Langone Medical Center, told CBS.

What it involves

The surgery involves transplanting a penis from a recently deceased donor as opposed to fashioning something that looks like a penis from other types of tissue, which is the procedure done for transgender patients seeking gender reassignment surgery, [The New York Times explains](#).

A penis transplant recipient needs to have certain blood vessels, nerves and his urethra intact. If successful, the patient will be able to have erections without the help of an implant – and, if he still has his testicles, potentially have his own biological children, according to the Times. Patients will have to be on anti-rejection medication for the rest of their lives.

Several servicemen approached Johns Hopkins about the procedure before the university started seeking internal and external approvals to perform the transplants in July 2013, [The Washington Post reported](#). Surgeons have been practicing the approximately 12-hour surgery on cadavers.

“We’ve done that on multiple occasions, and I think we’re pretty close to being ready to perform the surgery. We’re optimistic that significant function can return,” Dr. W. P. Andrew Lee, chairman of the department of plastic reconstructive surgery at Johns Hopkins, said to the Post.

The first known penis transplant happened in China in 2006, but surgeons removed the organ after two weeks “because of a severe psychological problem of the recipient and his wife,” [The Guardian reported](#) at the time.

The first successful penis transplant happened in South Africa in December 2014, [Bloomberg reported](#). The recipient, whose penis had been amputated after a botched circumcision, learned he was becoming a father a few months later, [according to The Guardian](#).

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