

Testosterone, DSDs and the trans athlete in women's sport

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One of the more controversial topics in sport in recent years has been the eligibility and participation of trans athletes and athletes with differences in sex development (DSDs). Understandably, most of the discussion has focused on women's sport, given the typical superior sport performance of men versus women. Trans women and individuals with DSDs are not the same, genetically or otherwise, so the challenges their potential participation presents for women's sport should be considered independently. However, one hormone that is relevant when considering either trans women or individuals with DSDs is testosterone, because of its key role in producing substantial differences in anthropometric and physiological characteristics between the sexes that are relevant to sport performance. Therefore, this session will begin at sex-based differences in anthropometric and physiological characteristics, progress to sex-based differences in sport performance, then outline the genetics underlying those differences and, via hormones, ultimately consider sport eligibility policies, with reference to medical ethics en route. Contemporary research will be cited, including that which assesses the effects of testosterone suppression on physical performance in trans women. Conclusions of relevance to policymakers will be drawn that inevitably reflect a combination of the scientific evidence and the considered but personal view of the speaker. Obviously, many people have firmly held views on these topics, so not everyone will agree with all the conclusions. But if, by the end of the session, most people are more informed and more willing and able to engage in conversation with colleagues, athletes and organisations about these topics more confidently, the session will have been a success.