

## **Intersex Justice Activists and Columbia Students Demand Columbia's Hospital End Medically Unnecessary Surgery**

**WHEN:** Sunday, November 13th at 2pm

**WHERE:** J. Hood Wright Park -> Columbia New York Presbyterian Children's Hospital of New York (CHONY)

**WHO:** Intersex activists, Columbia Students for Intersex Justice, Intersex Justice Project, InterACT, and allies.

**WHAT:** Protest for Intersex justice demanding New York Presbyterian hospitals (including Columbia and Cornell) become the first private hospital system in New York to ban medically unnecessary genital surgeries for children.

**WHY:** Columbia Students for Intersex Justice:

- "When our hospital system refuses to listen to Intersex-led organizations to inform Intersex healthcare? We protest!
- When our institution fails to ban human rights violations? We protest!
- When a perpetrator of sexual abuse and violence continues to hold the *highest* position of power in his department at Cornell? We protest!  
*(If you're unfamiliar, we're referring to Dix Poppas, Chief of Cornell Pediatric Urology. More info is below.)*
- When our hospitals do not take accountability for harming Intersex children? We protest!
- When doctors deny children the freedom, autonomy and power to make *their own* choices about *their own* bodies? We protest!
- As medical students, we have a responsibility to recognize our unique positionality and power at our institutions to build change. Intersex justice means affirming healthcare for all. It means ending human rights violations. It means bodily autonomy. It means reproductive justice. It means shifting power from our medical institutions to the people. It means building the world we want for ourselves, our patients, our children and our ancestors. Medical students, doctors, and healthcare workers need to be a part of this movement. We have the opportunity to replace the medical industrial complex and its pathologization and abandonment of Intersex people with healthcare that affirms and celebrates variations in sex characteristics"

**MEDIA:** @IntersexJusticeProject, @CUstudents4Intersexjustice

**NEW YORK CITY:** Intersex\* justice activists and allies are uniting in protest of medically unnecessary genital surgeries for Intersex children at New York Presbyterian (NYP) hospitals (including Columbia and Cornell). The [United Nations](#) and [Human Rights Watch](#) have named these procedures as forms of torture and human rights violations. In 2021, [NYC H+H](#) created a policy prohibiting all medically unnecessary surgeries on intersex children in their hospitals and the [NYC Council](#) passed legislation requiring the department of mental health and hygiene to create an information campaign about medically unnecessary interventions for Intersex children.

Since the early 1960s, Intersex children have been subjected to medically unnecessary procedures before being able to provide voluntary, informed assent. These surgeries are still permitted at NYP hospitals and hospitals across the United States. In July of 2020, Lurie Children's Hospital [pledged](#) to work towards ending Intersex surgeries and providing affirming care for Intersex individuals, after years of organizing by the Intersex Justice Project. Boston

Children's Hospital [pledged](#) to stop performing vaginal and clitoral surgeries on Intersex infants, a decision made possible by the tireless work of Intersex activists, medical students, and InterACT.

For [almost 30 years](#), Intersex advocates have been calling for the end of medically unnecessary childhood genital surgeries that can cause harm. Harm includes and is not limited to: surgical changes the individual later [rejects](#), infertility, [impaired](#) sexual function and sensation, [increased](#) mental health distress, the need for life-long hormone replacement therapy, and follow-up surgeries. Despite continued criticism and calls for institutional accountability and reparations, doctors continue to perform such operations. One of these doctors is Dix Poppas, who acts as the Chief of Pediatric Urology at Cornell, despite [his history](#) of unethical and abusive physical examination techniques. The lack of accountability is infuriating.

Our mission is to dismantle systems and practices that pathologize and oppress Intersex people, while imagining and building new healthcare and resources that affirm and fulfill the needs of Intersex people. We demand that NYP hospitals (including Columbia & Cornell):

1. End medically unnecessary childhood genital surgeries, including clitoroplasties and vaginoplasties, for all people, regardless of chromosomes
2. Publicly investigate Dix Poppas for clitoral stimulation testing
3. Provide reparations for individuals who were harmed as children with variations in sex characteristics at NYP, in the form of (a) Public apology for the medical violence and harm noted above. (b) Free, affirming healthcare.

\*What is Intersex? All people have variations in their 7 characteristics of sex: chromosomes, gonads, internal sex organs, genitalia, hormone production, hormone response, and secondary sex characteristics. Some people have variations, such as hypospadias and Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH),\*\* that are medicalized and pathologized by doctors. Not all people who have variations in sex traits identify as Intersex. Intersex people can have any gender identity and sexual orientation.

\*\*Hypospadias refers to the urethral meatus ("pee-hole") located on the underside of the penis; Congenital Adrenal Hypoplasia (CAH) is characterized by decreased cortisol and increased testosterone. People with XX chromosomes have a uterus, ovaries, genitalia on the penis-to-clitoris spectrum, and secondary sex characteristics from both estrogen and testosterone.