

THE CENTER FOR HUMAN REPRODUCTION

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Fertility Preservation offers a unique safety net for cancer patients, yet some doctors fail to mention it.

Many physicians admit that they are reluctant to discuss the availability of fertility preserving techniques, or to inform young patients about risks of cancer treatments that may leave them infertile.

Fertility preservation is a collection of novel strategies designed to preserve a patient's fertility options through use of innovative treatments such as cryopreservation of ovarian tissue, eggs, and sperm. These techniques are of special value to cancer patients who, facing treatments to save their lives, also may end up with permanent damage to their reproductive abilities.

Despite availability of potentially effective fertility preservation strategies, some doctors admit that they do not inform young women of risks to their fertility and do not discuss available fertility preservation options. This surprising news was revealed in a study just published online by the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, titled, "Fertility Preservation and Adolescent/Young Adult Cancer Patients: Physician Communication Challenges," authored by Gwendolyn Quinn, Ph.D., and Susan Vadaparampil, Ph.D.

Physicians are apparently reluctant to discuss fertility options at a time when patients are concentrating on a major threat to their lives and when fertility preservation could add to the already existing financial burden of cancer treatments. Some consider it inappropriate to raise the issue of future sexuality when cancer patients are children. The result is more and more patients are successfully recovering from diagnoses of cancer only to discover after the fact that survival came at the cost of their fertility.

Despite this gap in patient knowledge among cancer patients, awareness of fertility preservation is spreading to other patient populations. As reported by Kutluk Oktay, M.D., a pioneer in fertility preservation, and Medical Director of the Institute for Fertility Preservation (IFP) at the Center for Human Reproduction (CHR) in New York City, at a recent meeting of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine in San Francisco, non-cancer patients comprise the fastest growing segment of new fertility preservation patients coming to IFP, often including diagnoses such as ovarian cysts, lupus, and Turner's Syndrome.

Dr. Oktay developed and performed the world's first ovarian transplantation procedures, and pioneered new ovarian stimulation protocols for embryo and oocyte freezing for breast and endometrial cancer patients. For more on fertility preservation, including interesting patient success stories, Dr. Oktay is available for interviews.

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