Cancer Division

Cancer and fertility: a guide for women

You have recently been told you that you are going to need treatment for your cancer, which it is hoped will cure your disease. This treatment (chemotherapy, radiotherapy or surgery) may damage your future reproductive ability. You will have been given some information to read about fertility and cancer (the cancer backup fact sheet). This leaflet will offer you some additional local information about the options available to you. The choice to consider fertility treatment is yours. We can advise you about what options may be available to you, and refer you to the reproductive medicine team for discussion and more detailed information. If you do not wish to discuss your future fertility, your decision will be respected.

Fertility preserving treatments

The treatments that are available to women include IVF (In Vitro Fertilization) and embryo cryopreservation (freezing), or oocyte (egg) freezing. The Cancer backup booklet explains these procedures in more depth. These treatments can be arranged by the reproductive medicine team at Addenbrooke’s.

If you decide not to have fertility preserving treatment there are future options available to you. It is possible that your fertility will return but this cannot be guaranteed; it is dependent on your age, treatment and type of cancer. If you decide not to have treatment, or your doctor does not feel it is appropriate for you (this will be discussed with you) and you would like to have a child in the future, you may want to consider using donated eggs. These are obtained from a woman who freely gives eggs to help another woman to become pregnant. The donor is usually anonymous, but known donors are also sometimes used. Many fertility clinics operate egg sharing programs in which a woman (the donor) and her partner who need fertility treatment anonymously choose to share her eggs with another woman who also requires fertility treatment.

A surrogate mother can be used to carry a child created from a donor egg for you if you have had surgery, which prevents you from becoming pregnant. This is a very complicated procedure. Application for treatment must be submitted to an ethics committee for approval, and extensive counselling is required.

Legal requirements

There are a number of legal requirements about the storage of embryos and eggs. You will be asked to sign consent forms agreeing to treatment and storage of your embryos/eggs. You will also be asked what you would like to do with them if your cancer treatment is not as successful as hoped. In addition to this you will need to be tested for viruses such as HIV, hepatitis and syphilis before the embryos/eggs can be collected and stored. This is done to protect all other tissues that are in storage.
Cost

The cost of these treatments varies at different hospitals and national guidelines are currently changing. The reproductive medicine team will be able to offer you detailed information about the cost of these treatments.

Using the stored embryos or eggs

A common question when considering collecting embryos or eggs from you is how long before I can use them? It is usually recommended that you wait for about two years after completing your cancer treatment before you consider using your stored embryos or eggs. This is because it is advisable to be in a long lasting remission before you start planning fertility treatment.

Privacy & Dignity

Same sex bays and bathrooms are offered in all wards except critical care and theatre recovery areas where the use of high-tech equipment and/or specialist one to one care is required.

We are a smoke-free site: smoking will not be allowed anywhere on the hospital site. For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169.

Other formats:

If you would like this information in another language or audio, please contact Interpreting services on telephone: 01223 256998, or email: interpreting@addenbrookes.nhs.uk For Large Print information please contact the patient information team: patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

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