

BREAST CANCER PATIENTS LACK ADEQUATE FERTILITY PRESERVATION ADVICE

WOMEN MAY NOT receive adequate information on fertility preservation before breast cancer treatment, according to research presented at the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Cancer Conference in Liverpool today (Monday).

Researchers at The Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust surveyed* more than 300 NHS breast cancer surgeons, nurses and cancer doctors to ask which factors influenced whether they discussed fertility preservation with their patients. This is the first survey of fertility preservation practices among breast cancer specialists in the UK.

Fewer than 40 per cent of those surveyed reported that the personal circumstances of a patient, such as whether they had children or a partner, influenced whether they discussed fertility preservation.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed in women of reproductive age. There are around 4,900 new cases of breast cancer diagnosed in UK women aged under 45 each year.

Patients may not have completed their families at the time of their breast cancer diagnosis. There are concerns that taking action to preserve fertility might delay or influence the effectiveness of cancer treatment and fertility after cancer treatment is an important issue for these women.

Previous research showed that only half of women under 40 diagnosed with breast cancer felt they had adequately discussed fertility preservation options before treatment.

Report author, Dr Judy King, cancer specialist at the Royal Free Hospital, said: "This important survey reveals wide variation in the knowledge, attitudes and practices of healthcare professionals managing young women with breast cancer.

"This may mean there is a lack of standard information being given to patients, and that referral to a fertility specialist is not always being offered.

"Each breast cancer multidisciplinary team should have a Fertility Lead responsible for identifying patients who are suitable for referral to a fertility specialist. There should be a clear, prompt referral pathway for such patients, to allow time for fertility preservation without the need to delay the start of chemotherapy."

Dr Jane Cope, director of the NCRI, said: "Fertility preservation is an important topic for younger women treated for breast cancer and might influence a patient's decision on treatment. This first survey of the referral practices of healthcare professionals in the UK highlights that there is a lack of clear and consistent advice being given to patients and this needs to be addressed urgently."

ENDS

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Notes to Editors:

*An email inviting respondents to participate in an online survey was distributed via the National Cancer Research Institute Breast Cancer Clinical Studies Group, the Cancer Research UK breast group, the British Association of Surgical Oncologists breast group and the Breast Cancer Care Nursing Network.

Find out more about fertility and cancer treatment:

<http://www.macmillan.org.uk/Cancerinformation/Livingwith-andaftercancer/Symptomssideeffects/Fertility/Fertilityin-women.aspx>

View the conference abstract here:

<http://www.ncri.org.uk/ncriconference/2011abstracts/abstracts/A123.html>



About the NCRI Cancer Conference

The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Cancer Conference is the UK's major forum for showcasing the best British and international cancer research. The Conference offers unique opportunities for networking and sharing knowledge by bringing together world leading experts from all cancer research disciplines. The seventh annual NCRI Cancer Conference is taking place from the 6-9 November 2011 at the BT Convention Centre in Liverpool. For more information visit www.ncri.org.uk/ncriconference

About the NCRI

The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) was established in April 2001. It is a UK-wide partnership between the government, charity and industry which promotes co-operation in cancer research among the 22 member organisations for the benefit of patients, the public and the scientific community. For more information visit www.ncri.org.uk

NCRI members are: the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI); Association for International Cancer Research; Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council; Breakthrough Breast Cancer; Breast Cancer Campaign; Cancer Research UK; CHILDREN with CANCER UK, Department of Health; Economic and Social Research Council; Leukaemia & Lymphoma Research; Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research; Macmillan Cancer Support; Marie Curie Cancer Care; Medical Research Council; Northern Ireland Health and Social Care (Research & Development Office); Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation; Scottish Government Health Directorates (Chief Scientist Office); Tenovus; The Prostate Cancer Charity; Welsh Government (National Institute for Social Care and Health Research); The Wellcome Trust; and Yorkshire Cancer Research.

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