



Doctors Surveyed about Talking with Patients about Fertility

Important Points:

- Hematopoietic cell transplantation can cause patients to become infertile. However, there are options for fertility preservation, which allow patients to have children in the future.
- Most doctors who responded to the survey feel comfortable talking with their patients about fertility preservation.
- Patients must tell their doctor if they want to talk about fertility preservation.

Hematopoietic stem cell transplantation can cause patients to become infertile (unable to have children). However, there are ways for transplant patients to have children even if they become infertile.

Before transplant, men can freeze their sperm, and women can freeze their eggs or embryos (eggs that have been fertilized with sperm). For women, this process usually takes 10-14 days, but men can freeze their sperm right away. The frozen products are stored at a lab until the patient is ready to have children.

Freezing sperm, eggs and embryos to have children in the future is called fertility preservation.

Researchers wanted to know how doctors talk with patients about fertility preservation, so they emailed a survey to 1,035 transplant doctors. 185 (18%) doctors completed it. The survey asked doctors about their thoughts and actions about fertility preservation.

Talking with Patients about Fertility Preservation

Most doctors who responded to the survey said they feel comfortable talking with patients about fertility preservation. However, many don't give their patients educational materials on fertility preservation. The doctors feel most materials aren't helpful to transplant patients because they are written for other patients.

Doctors talk about fertility issues LESS when:

- Patients are very sick.
- Patients are adults (18 or older).

Doctors talk about fertility issues MORE when:

- Patients are children (17 or younger), even if they are very sick.
- Doctors work at a hospital with an infertility specialist.

Why Doctors Don't Talk to Patients about Fertility Preservation

There are many reasons doctors don't talk to patients about fertility preservation. (The percent of doctors who said each reason is written in parentheses.)

- Patients are too sick to delay treatment. (55%)
- Health insurance may not pay for fertility preservation. (35%)
- Patients may not be able to afford fertility preservation. (33%)
- Doctors don't have enough time to talk to patients. (27%)
- Patients don't want to talk about fertility preservation. (14%)

What Doctors Should Do

- Work with other transplant doctors and infertility specialists to learn more about fertility preservation.
- Create educational materials specific to transplant patients.

What Patients Should Do

- Tell your doctor if you want to talk about fertility preservation.

This is very, very important! Some doctors don't talk to patients about fertility preservation because they think patients don't want to talk about it. Therefore, you must tell your doctor if you want to talk about fertility preservation.

- Consult a fertility specialist if you want to freeze your sperm, eggs, or embryos.

Source:

Physician perceptions and practice patterns regarding fertility preservation in hematopoietic cell transplant recipients. Loren AW, Brazauskas R, Chow EJ, Gilleece M, Halter J, Jacobsohn DA, Joshi S, Pidala J, Quinn GP, Wang Z, Apperley JF, Burns LJ, Hale GA, Hayes-Lattin M, Kamble R, Lazarus H, McCarthy PL, Reddy V, Warwick AB, Bolwell BJ, Duncan C, Socie G, Sorrow ML, Wingard JR, Majhail NS. Bone Marrow Transplantation. 2013 Aug 01;48(8):1091-1097. Epub 2013 Feb 18.