

Teenagers and Young Adults with Cancer Need Specialist Fertility Services

Tuesday 1 November, 2016

During National Fertility Awareness Week, a leading teenage cancer charity is shining a spotlight on the need for specialist fertility provisions for teenagers and young adults with cancer.

In the UK, around 2,500 young people are diagnosed with cancer each year and around 15 per cent of them have a high risk of future fertility problems. Their specialist needs and support in terms of fertility are often overlooked.

Teenagers and Young Adults with Cancer (TYAC) the UK's only membership body for professionals involved in the care of teenagers and young adults (TYA) with cancer, is calling for better awareness of fertility preservation options and treatments for infertility for teenagers and young adults with cancer or who are long term survivors of cancer.

Dr Dave Hobin, Consultant Paediatric Oncologist and TYAC Chair, commented: "Fertility issues, as a result of cancer treatment, are one of the major problems that impact on teenagers and young adults. All of us involved in the care of this group should be advocating for young people to have access to fertility preservation technology and specialist fertility treatments funded by the NHS and ensuring that patients are fully aware of the risks and have options available to them for their future."

Sue Morgan MBE, Secretary of TYAC and one of the charity's founding members, is an expert in working with young people who have issues with fertility following treatment. She comments, "The impact of a diagnosis of cancer and treatment, on both fertility and psychosexual identity, can be potentially devastating, particularly if not acknowledged and addressed correctly."

Bryan Woodward, a Consultant Clinical Embryologist and Chair of the UK's professional body for male infertility, the Association of Biomedical Andrologists (ABA), comments, "15-30 per cent of cured male cancer patients will never recover functional spermatogenesis. In post-pubertal teenagers and young adults pretherapy cryopreservation of semen is the only well-established method to preserve fertility potential. However, many TYA patients will not be psychologically prepared for this."

As a membership organisation TYAC brings together professionals from a wide range of disciplines to share best practice, enhance knowledge and services, empowering members to have a positive impact on the quality of life and survival outcomes for young people with cancer. Fertility is an important part of this.

TYAC believes that every young person with cancer has the right to prompt diagnosis and age-appropriate treatment and support from specialist professionals trained in caring for young people with cancer.

Alongside its main funding partners (Teenage Cancer Trust and CLIC Sargent), TYAC has been instrumental in promoting teenage and young adult cancer care as a distinct discipline. The value of specialist training and a holistic approach to supporting the young person, not just focusing upon treatment of the disease, is increasingly recognised.

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