

Fertility Issues in Female Cancer Survivors

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Introduction

Cancer treatment has a direct effect on the fertility of women. Different treatment methods have different infertility risk levels, ranging from low risk to high risk. The radiation

from the cancer treatment methods affects the reproductive organs with cancer killing high-energy rays damaging the ovaries. Hormone therapies, on the other hand, may prevent ovulation or cause birth defects. “Hormone therapies used to treat breast cancer or other cancers can affect your ability to have a child” (American Cancer Society, 2017). Most patients do not understand the depth of effects on their fertility. Therefore, there is a need for this information to be put out there and available to the cancer patients before treatment starts. “All women with cancer should discuss the risk of infertility and fertility preservation options with their doctors as soon as possible before cancer treatment begins” (American Society for Clinical Oncology, 2018). As such there is need to help cancer survivors increase their quality of life and fertility levels.

There is a huge disparity on the information on cancer and its apparent relationship with infertility given to male versus female patients. Additionally, it takes a longer time for women to access fertility preservation methods as compared to how long it takes for men to access these services. As such, women need access to this information and services to improve their quality of life and for decision making about future reproduction. According to Moghadam (2014), infertility reduces the quality of life due to stress and depression that it often causes. This study uses the qualitative method. The following questions will be answered; Are you aware that cancer treatment methods can have a negative impact on fertility and quality of life? How much information do you have about the infertility risks associated with cancer treatment methods? What do you believe is the best source of information for fertility options prior to treatment? Do you know of the existing fertility preservation methods? Do you know about access to fertility preservation services?

Methods

Subject

This study will use the qualitative method of data collection. A set of both open-ended and close-ended questions in a questionnaire will be administered to the subject. The subjects of the survey are females of all ages. The subjects of the interviews are female cancer survivors in the pre-menopausal stage of life, or between the ages of 13 and 45. The individuals participating in the survey are appropriate for the study because they provide insightful information regarding female's knowledge of cancer treatment and its effects on female fertility. The cancer survivors are appropriate for the study because they give vital information about how their cancer treatment has affected their quality of life, as well as how much information, if any, they received regarding fertility and cancer treatment prior to treatment. Both the survey and interview will cut across women in different levels of education and stages of life. The main limitation is that subjects may not give detailed and honest information as required to inform the study.

Measurement

The interview questions explore the extent to which female cancer patients and survivors have access to information about the risks of cancer treatment methods and the available fertility preservation methods. The context analysis will be the measurement instrument. The survey questions were developed using the BRFSS as a template. The questions ask participants their age range and assess their knowledge of cancer treatment and its relationship with fertility. The interview questions were also developed using the BRFSS. These questions ask the participants about their personal experiences with oncologists and their feelings regarding their diagnosis. Because the survey was conducted over an application, we did not use any equipment. The

interviews were conducted in a quiet, comfortable room using a personal computer to record responses.

Procedure

The survey and interview will be conducted during National Young Adult Cancer Awareness Week, April 1st through April 7th. The survey we utilized for the study asks categorical questions such as age range. The survey also uses a Likert Scale for questions regarding whether or not cancer and cancer treatment can have a negative impact on a woman's fertility and quality of life. One open-ended question asks the participant if they know anyone who has tried to conceive following treatment, as well as how long they waited if they did. We included rank scale questions when asking questions about the perceived effectiveness of each treatment type, surgery, chemotherapy, and radiotherapy. Finally, we included multiple choice questions and true/false questions to gauge the knowledge level regarding fertility in female cancer survivors. The interview contains the same material in a slightly different format since we are speaking directly to survivors.

Data Analysis

The overall research question; how much information do females have about the fertility risks associated with cancer treatment methods? To analyze the data, it will be categorized into different age groups, organized, conceptualized, connected and then interpreted to create an understandable account.

References

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