

Oncofertility & Fertility Preservation: Who, What, Why, When, and How



Glenn L. Schattman, MD, FACOG
Weill Cornell Medical College
New York, NY

Patients with cancer face an immediate threat not only to their survival but to their future fertility. Numerous medical societies have published guidelines

clearly stating the need to discuss the effects of treatments on an individual's future reproductive capacity. Patients have voiced their opinion about the importance of receiving this information so that they may make informed decisions about their treatment options. Oncologists have made great strides in treating patients with cancer and long-term survival has improved dramatically. However, referrals for fertility preservation have not shared similar successes. Limited understanding about the effects of chemotherapy on ovarian reserve and reproduction, as well as limited knowledge about what can be offered, including success rates and costs, limit the potential for patients to avail themselves of successful fertility preservation options.

Patients with estrogen sensitive diseases like breast and endometrial cancers are a particularly difficult population of patients to treat as they often have concerns about

the hormonal environment associated with normal ovarian stimulation (up to 10 fold higher elevated levels of estradiol) compared to natural cycles. Concerns regarding reduced efficacy of treatment regimens or increases in recurrence with short durations of elevated estradiol levels, although not supported by literature, oftentimes stop women from pursuing IVF and limit their reproductive options post-treatment. Natural cycle IVF, even "minimal stimulation" protocols do not address the dilemma or provide for a reasonable probability of having a genetic child. Recent advances in ovarian stimulation protocols including the use of aromatase inhibitors and "random start" stimulation overcome many of these problems providing for adequate numbers of gametes relative to ovarian reserve as well as preventing the rise in estradiol seen with conventional stimulation protocols. Additionally, limited evidence exists regarding the safety and efficacy of these stimulation methods and will be discussed.

Educating patients and their oncologists is critical to ensuring quality-of-life after successful treatment. This presentation will address many of these concerns and provide the audience with the methods to offer these novel stimulation protocols for their patients and the information to counsel patients about the risks and outcomes associated with fertility preservation.