

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Infertility after cancer doubles the pain

Professor Jane Ussher and Associate Professor Janette Perz from the Centre for Health Research and Dr Emilee Gilbert, from the School of Social Sciences & Psychology are leading a team of researchers to study fertility after treatment for cancer from the perspective of patients, their partners and health professionals. This Australian Research Council Linkage project will be conducted with partners CanTeen, Cancer Council NSW, Family Planning NSW, National Breast Cancer Foundation, Nepean Hospital and Westmead Hospital with the aim of increasing knowledge of this important health issue and helping to develop programs to reduce distress.

'Fertility is one of the major concerns confronting people with cancer and their partners, with infertility post-cancer being described as a "double trauma",' says Professor Ussher. 'Advances in treating cancer have increased the number of long-term survivors yet health professionals rarely address this important quality-of-life issue and it remains largely invisible within cancer policy and practice guidelines.'

Infertility can be caused by cancer itself, or by treatment, resulting in early menopause or uterine damage in women, and retrograde ejaculation or a lack of sperm in men. In survivors of childhood cancer, puberty may be delayed. Disease and treatment can also impair the sex lives of people with cancer, with knock-on effects for fertility.

Current research about fertility post-cancer is restricted by its focus on a limited range of cancer types and age groups ignores the experiences of partners. This project will examine the fertility concerns of men and women, and their partners, across a range of cancer types and



stages, including a range of age groups and relationship situations. The multi-method research is part of an ongoing collaboration within the project team. It involves three stages: questionnaires surveying people with cancer, partners and health professionals; individual interviews and case studies; and development and evaluation of support programs and resources. With more than 40,000 new cases of cancer diagnosed in NSW each year, this project addresses a significant community issue.

Project Title: The construction and experience of fertility in the context of cancer: patient, partner and health professional perspectives.

Funding has been set at: \$693,825

Other Researchers: Ms Gillian Batt, Dr Kendra Sundquist & Ms Annie Miller (Cancer Council NSW); Dr Alison Butt (National Breast Cancer Foundation); Dr Gerard Wain & Ms Kim Hobbs (Westmead Hospital); Dr Laura Kirsten & Dr Cathy Mason (Nepean Hospital); Dr Pandora Patterson (CanTeen) and Dr Edith Weisberg (Family Planning NSW)

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