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A national study of the provision of oncofertility services to female patients in Canada.

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Author: Samantha Yee
William Buckett
Sharon Campbell
Rochelle Yanofsky
Ronald D Barr

Author Affiliation: Centre for Fertility and Reproductive Health, Mount Sinai Hospital, Toronto ON, Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto, Toronto ON.

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Abstract: This study aimed to gain a better understanding of the fertility preservation services provided by Canadian fertility clinics to women with cancer.

We invited a total of 76 fertility clinics across Canada to complete a mailed questionnaire related to the availability, accessibility, affordability, and utilization of fertility preservation services for oncology patients.

The total response rate was 59.2%: 72.4% for IVF clinics and 51.1% for fertility centres without on-site IVF. Not all the responding IVF centres accepted oncology referrals for women. Six clinics without on-site IVF accepted cancer patients for consultation. The medical consultation fees are covered by public health insurance in all provinces. The majority of respondents expedited the referrals to schedule an initial medical appointment within three days. Despite that, the referral volume reported by respondents was markedly low for all except two facilities. With over 4000 young women of reproductive age given a diagnosis of cancer each year in Canada, the findings suggest that cancer patients are severely under-served by fertility clinics.

There is a need to develop a stronger partnership between the fields of oncology and reproductive medicine to further improve access of patients with cancer to fertility preservation services. Development of evidence-based practice guidelines covering medical, clinical, psychosocial, ethical, and legal aspects geared to the Canadian health care system would help to avoid ambiguity relating to the roles and responsibilities in the provision of fertility preservation services. Such processes would ensure optimization of services so that all young cancer patients would receive the best care in protecting their fertility.

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