

## Physicians' Knowledge, Attitude & Practices Regarding Fertility Issues for Young Breast Cancer Patients

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### Background

Breast cancer is the most common cancer among Indian women. Approximately 6% to 7% of women diagnosed with breast cancer are younger than 40 years at the time of their diagnosis. For many young women with early breast cancer, fertility is a priority. Increasing survival rates in patients affected by oncological disease and advances in reproductive medicine have led to the development and increasing use of various fertility preservation techniques.

### Aims & Objectives

To study physicians' knowledge, attitude and behaviour regarding fertility issues for young breast cancer patients.

### Materials & Methods

The study was a cross sectional study carried out at a tertiary care centre in New Delhi. The sampling technique was non probability sampling and the sample size was N=300. The study tool was a self administered preformed structured Performa. It included questions on knowledge about fertility issues, practice behaviour, potential barriers for discussing fertility issues, attitude toward fertility preservation and responding physicians' socio-demographic backgrounds. The study period was March to May 2013.

### Results

300 physicians responded to the performa. These included general surgeons, surgical oncologists,

gynaecologists & medical oncologists. 49% were females. Physicians who had better knowledge score and positive attitudes towards fertility preservation were more likely to discuss potential fertility issues with cancer patients. Regarding knowledge, there was no significant difference with gender and religion. There was significant association with number of breast cancer surgeries performed in a week and number of breast cancer patients (<40 yrs) seen in a week. With reference to attitude, there was no significant difference with gender and between various specialties. Those with a positive attitude had a positive practice behaviour. Ladies were more likely to discuss impact of cancer treatment on future fertility with patients, consult a reproductive specialist and refer patients with questions about fertility to reproductive specialists. Frequency of General Surgeons agreeing with the above statements was maximum followed by Gynecologists. Social stigma, socioeconomic status, lack of knowledge and awareness, psychological and emotional issues, and illiteracy were identified as major barriers for discussing fertility issues with the patients.

### Conclusions

Proper knowledge and a positive attitude, of the physician, towards fertility preservation in young breast cancer patients is very important in today's clinical scenario. Effective programs and protocols should be developed for a better approach towards fertility preservation by the physician. Better awareness about breast cancer and fertility preservation should be spread among the masses, to overcome a few of the issues that were identified as barriers for discussing fertility issues with the patients.