Young Early Stage Ovarian Cancer Patients Can Preserve Fertility

Atlanta 2009/08/10 -A new study finds that young women with early-stage ovarian cancer can preserve future fertility by keeping at least one ovary or the uterus without increasing the risk of dying from the disease. The study is published in the September 15, 2009 issue of Cancer, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society.

Most cases of ovarian cancer are diagnosed at later stages and in older women. However, up to 17 percent of ovarian tumors occur in women 40 years of age or younger, many of whom have early stage disease. Surgery for ovarian cancer usually involves complete removal of the uterus (hysterectomy) and ovaries, which not only results in the loss of fertility, but also subjects young women to the long-term consequences of estrogen deprivation.

Researchers led by Jason Wright, M.D., of Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City conducted a study to examine the safety of fertility-conserving surgery in premenopausal women with ovarian cancer. This type of surgery conserves at least one ovary or the uterus.

The investigators analyzed data from women 50 years of age or younger who were diagnosed with early stage (stage I) ovarian cancer between 1988 and 2004 and who were registered in the National Cancer Institute's Surveillance, Epidemiology and End Results database, a population-based cancer registry that includes approximately 26 percent of the US population. Patients who had both of their ovaries removed were compared with those who had only the cancerous ovary removed. A second analysis examined uterine conservation vs hysterectomy.

For their first analysis, the researchers identified 1,186 ovarian cancer patients. While most had both ovaries removed, about one in three (36 percent) had one ovary conserved. They found those in whom one ovary was saved had similar survival for up to at least five years.

To examine the effect of uterine preservation, the investigators studied a total of 2,911 women. While most of the women underwent hysterectomy, about one in four (23 percent) had uterine preservation. Uterine preservation also had no effect on survival.

Women who were younger, who were diagnosed in more recent years, and who resided in the eastern or western United States were more likely to undergo ovarian or uterine conservation.

These results are promising for the many young women who are diagnosed with ovarian cancer each year. An estimated 21,650 women in the United States were diagnosed with the disease in 2008. "Given the potential reproductive and nonreproductive benefits of ovarian and uterine preservation, the benefits of conservative surgical management should be considered in young women with ovarian cancer," the authors concluded.

Article: "Fertility preservation in young women with epithelial ovarian cancer." Jason D. Wright, Monjri Shah, Leny Mathew, William M. Burke, Jennifer Culhane, Noah Goldman, Peter B. Schiff, and Thomas J. Herzog. Cancer; Published Online: August 10, 2009 (DOI: 10.1002/cncr.24461); Print Issue Date: September 15, 2009.

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