

MACHON PUAH

GIVE US LIFE

In the recent Annual Meeting of the European Society for Human Reproduction and Embryology (ESHRE) held in Geneva, there were a number of interesting presentations. One was from a Scottish group regarding the impact of cancer treatment on fertility. Looking at over 23,000 female survivors of cancer who were 39 years of age or younger they found that the treatment for cancer had a very detrimental effect on their fertility. Such women were 38% less likely to achieve a pregnancy than women who had not undergone cancer treatment. To be more exact this shows a marked decrease in pregnancy rates but not necessarily on fertility since eggs, embryos or even ovarian tissue can be frozen prior to cancer treatment. These can later be thawed and used to achieve a pregnancy.

This information is important since it is clear proof of what was suspected that cancer treatment can have a very significant detrimental effect of fertility. It is also worth bearing in mind the importance of freezing genetic material prior to cancer treatment.

When parents learn that their child has cancer and needs to undergo very extensive treatment to heal them they are in a state of total shock, once described to me like a deer caught in the headlights. They can think of only one thing; they will do anything to make sure that their child is cured. Unfortunately, too often, in the scramble to find the best oncologists

and the preferred treatment, the question of fertility preservation is put outside and even ignored completely. Doctors are also absorbed in working hard to provide the best medicine to heal the sick child. They do not always remind the parents of the importance of making sure that the child's fertility will not be impaired in the process.

The stark reality of the numbers in this study should be a reminder of how cancer treatment can affect fertility and how imperative it is to make sure that this will not be an issue.

During these weeks we are thinking about life as we start to pray for life and ask God to inscribe us for life in the Book of Life. The importance of life is repeated numerous times during our prayers and this intensifies during Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. As we ask God to give us life we need to be conscious of the importance of saving lives and ensuring the birth of future lives.

Fertility preservation for cancer patients is an important issue that needs to be discussed and presented to parents of such children in order to preserve and continue life in the future.

- *Rabbi Gideon Weitzman*