

**Failure to provide information about fertility to young man prior to
chemotherapy
(13HDC00475, 10 June 2014)**

Paediatric oncologist ~ DHB ~ Chemotherapy ~ Young patient ~ Fertility ~ Information ~ Systems ~ Right 6(1)

A man complained about the failure to be informed about the risks of chemotherapy drug in respect to fertility. The patient, who was 14 years old at the time, was diagnosed with having a Ewing sarcoma (cancer) of the pelvis. He was admitted to hospital for surgical treatment of the sarcoma, to be followed by chemotherapy treatment.

Prior to the first chemotherapy treatment the on-call paediatric oncologist met with the young man and his family to discuss the treatment. The potential impact of chemotherapy on fertility was mentioned but not emphasised. The discussion focussed mainly on the potential adverse effects of the drugs to be used during the treatment. The young man and his family were provided with written information about the chemotherapy drugs, but those information sheets did not refer to the potential impact of chemotherapy on fertility.

The DHB advised that, at the time of these events, the normal process was for fertility to be discussed with the patient by the Adolescent Nurse Specialist as part of a checklist prior to chemotherapy starting. However, the nurse specialist was on leave at the time and there was no apparent system in place to ensure that the checklist was covered by someone else in the nurse specialist's absence.

The young man underwent his first chemotherapy treatment. The next day a nurse mentioned fertility when completing a routine checklist. The young man's mother was upset when advised of the risk of infertility. The on-call paediatric oncologist met with the young man and his parents to discuss fertility and the option of storing a sperm sample. Part of this discussion took place in private with the young man, without his parents being present.

Adverse comment was made about the on-call paediatric oncologist's failure to provide that information to the young man prior to his first chemotherapy treatment, and his decision to discuss the option of the young man providing a sperm sample in the absence of his parents.

The DHB was found to have breached Right 6(1) for failing to have adequate mechanisms in place at the time of these events to ensure the provision of fertility information and treatment options to consumers prior to undertaking chemotherapy treatment.