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News Release

Female Cystic Fibrosis Patients Need More Contraceptive Guidance, Penn Medicine Study Finds

As Life Span for Once-Deadly Disease Increases, Unplanned and Mistimed Pregnancies are Common

May 06, 2015

Poster #209: Contraceptive Needs and Preferences in a Cohort of Women with Cystic Fibrosis

SAN FRANCISCO – Only half of women with cystic fibrosis (CF) report using contraception and frequently apt to become pregnant unintentionally, according to a new study from researchers at the [Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania](#). The results of the study were presented earlier this week at the [2015 American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists Annual Clinical and Scientific Meeting](#) in San Francisco. As recently as the 1960s, children with cystic fibrosis – an inherited disease that causes thick, sticky mucus to form in the lungs, pancreas, and other organs – often died before attending elementary school. Today many people with the disease live into their 30s, 40s and beyond.

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“As the median age of survival for women with cystic fibrosis rises, reproductive health is becoming increasingly important in this population,” said lead author Andrea H. Roe, MD, an OB/GYN resident at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. “While this once was not an issue, what we found is that participants in our study are sexually active, but contraceptive use is inadequate.”

The researchers used a survey to assess reproductive health and quality of life in patients with cystic fibrosis. Female participants aged 18 to 45 years were recruited through the electronic mailing list of the Penn Adult Cystic Fibrosis Program. Among 53 women surveyed, 83 percent reported being sexually active and 27 percent said they had been pregnant. Twenty-two percent of reported pregnancies were terminated, due to either unplanned pregnancy or suboptimal health status. Forty-nine percent of participants said they use contraception, compared to 65 percent of women in the same general U.S. population. Furthermore, women with more severe CF disease were revealed to be less likely to use contraception. Condoms and oral contraceptive pills were the most commonly used methods.

“With less than half reporting that they use contraception, there is clearly a significant unmet need for contraception in this population,” said senior author [Courtney A. Schreiber, MD, MPH](#), an associate professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Penn. “Participants said they prioritize effectiveness and ease of use in their contraceptive method. They also want to avoid side effects and diminished sexual enjoyment. It’s important that physicians working with this

population discuss these matters with them so that women with CF can avoid unintended pregnancy, especially in the context of a heritable disease that may be exacerbated by pregnancy. Pregnancy planning is important in the population.”

Other Penn co-authors are Sarah Traxler, MD, a fellow in Penn’s Family Planning program, and Denis Hadjiliadis, MD, PhD, director of Penn’s Adult Cystic Fibrosis Program.

Penn Medicine is one of the world’s leading academic medical centers, dedicated to the related missions of medical education, biomedical research, and excellence in patient care. Penn Medicine consists of the Raymond and Ruth Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania (founded in 1765 as the nation’s first medical school) and the University of Pennsylvania Health System, which together form a \$7.8 billion enterprise.

The Perelman School of Medicine has been ranked among the top medical schools in the United States for more than 20 years, according to U.S. News & World Report’s survey of research-oriented medical schools. The School is consistently among the nation’s top recipients of funding from the National Institutes of Health, with \$405 million awarded in the 2017 fiscal year.

The University of Pennsylvania Health System’s patient care facilities include: The Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania and Penn Presbyterian Medical Center — which are recognized as one of the nation’s top “Honor Roll” hospitals by U.S. News & World Report — Chester County Hospital; Lancaster General Health; Penn Medicine Princeton Health; Penn Wissahickon Hospice; and Pennsylvania Hospital – the nation’s first hospital, founded in 1751. Additional affiliated inpatient care facilities and services throughout the Philadelphia region include Good Shepherd Penn Partners, a partnership between Good Shepherd Rehabilitation Network and Penn Medicine, and Princeton House Behavioral Health, a leading provider of highly skilled and compassionate behavioral healthcare.

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