

Chapter 40

A Rewarding Experience for a Pediatric Urologist

Margarett Shnorhavorian

M. Shnorhavorian (B) Department of Pediatric Urology, Seattle Children's Hospital, University of Washington School of Medicine, Seattle, WA, USA e-mail:

margarett.shnorhavorian@seattlechildrens.org

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When I reflect on some of the most rewarding experiences in my practice, one of the most personally rewarding cases was on a fertility preservation consultation with a 12-year-old boy who had just been diagnosed with Ewing's sarcoma and told that the treatment would leave him infertile.

I got the page from his oncologist and I dropped everything to meet Tommy (fictional name to protect privacy) and his family in the oncology clinic. The room was quiet and the parents immediately impressed me as "salt of the earth" folks who were going to fight cancer with their son and wanted to make sure everything possible would be done for him. I introduced myself as an urologist and asked Tommy if he knew why I was there. He said, "Yeah, so I can be a dad someday." My eyes lit up as his description of my role was probably the best summary of what I do. It also reminded all of us in the room that Tommy was hopeful he would have a future beyond his cancer.

Based on Tommy's history and physical examination, I realized that he was not a candidate for sperm banking, but that I could perform testicular sperm extraction (TESE) while his line for chemotherapy was being placed in the operating room. Though thousands of TESE are performed every year in adults, Tommy would be the first TESE patient in our children's hospital. We had only recently started our fertility preservation program, so the next 24 h was spent coordinating surgeons, oncologists, nurses, the fertility lab, and the operating room. It was an elegant procedure, completed in 10 min. For good luck, I performed the "sperm dance" as taught to me by my mentors, in hopes of success as I handed off the tissue to the lab. The lab notified me that there was plenty of sperm and that the procedure was a success. It is often a challenge for me to explain to my 2-year old what I do as an urologist – but this time, when I came home I was beaming and said, "Mommy helped make sure a little boy could be a daddy some day!"

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