How the Dobbs Ruling on Abortion Impacts Cancer Patients and Their Families

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On Friday, June 24, the Supreme Court of the United States issued a long-awaited decision on Dobbs v. Jackson, which reverses the 1973 ruling on Roe v. Wade and returns the issue of the right to access abortion services to the states.

As a nonprofit entity whose mission is improving the lives of people with cancer and their families, the American Cancer Society isn't taking sides on the decision. However, the decision will impact cancer patients and their families and is likely to disproportionately affect communities of color.

We believe everyone, no matter where they live, should have a fair and just opportunity to prevent, find, treat and survive cancer. Therefore, we ask states to address the following considerations:

Cancer Treatment for Pregnant Patients

When someone receives a cancer diagnosis, it is critical they receive immediate care. Up to 1 in 1,000 pregnant women each year receive a cancer diagnosis. We know timely cancer treatment improves a person's chances of survivorship. As some states signal a determination to define personhood at fertilization, we are concerned about potential threats to a pregnant woman's ability to receive rapid cancer treatment. Every patient should be able to increase their likelihood to survive cancer by having the option to start cancer therapy immediately, regardless of pregnancy status.

Fertility Preservation

Cancer patients should also have the right to preserve fertility prior to initiating cancer treatment.

More than 60,000 young adults aged 20–39 are diagnosed with cancer each year in the U.S. Treatments for many of the younger adults may directly impact their ability to conceive children. For this population, fertility preservation becomes an important medical consideration. Approximately 5%-–6% of the population in childbearing age consists of cancer survivors. Experts recommend freezing fertilized embryos for fertility preservation. The American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN) currently supports state policies to expand insurance coverage of fertility preservation services for cancer patients.

Screening and Prevention

We also understand the vital importance of early screening and detection of cancer in improving a person's chances of surviving the disease. We oppose any action that results in limiting the number of institutions or clinics where people can receive access to affordable screening and early diagnosis.

We urge all states to consider the above ramifications for cancer patients. The American Cancer Society and ACS CAN will be actively monitoring the implications of the Supreme Court's decision and will continue to advocate for timely access to affordable screening services, evidence-based treatment, and fertility preservation for all, regardless of geography.

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