

Miracle baby born to cancer patient Marcus Ehrlich who lost his fertility

- by: *Sue Dunlevy National Health Reporter*
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Marcus Ehrlich, with seven-week-old daughter Winter, froze his sperm before treatment for leukaemia destroyed his fertility. Pictures: Justin Lloyd *Source: News Corp Australia*

EXCLUSIVE: Cancer threatened Marcus Ehrlich’s life and stripped him of his fertility but last month the 31-year-old was able to cradle a medical miracle in his arms — a daughter called Winter.

Diagnosed with [leukaemia](#) at age 23 fatherhood was far from Marcus’s mind as he concentrated on finishing his law degree and staying alive.

“When you are diagnosed with cancer all the things you take for granted in the world, your mortality, your health, even your fertility become front on mind all at once,” he told News Corp Australia.

Nine thousand people aged 0-44 are diagnosed with [cancer](#) in Australia each year but only half of them are told about the effect of cancer and its treatment on their fertility, says [Dr Antoinette Anazodo](#), Cancer Specialist, [Sydney Youth Cancer Service](#), [Prince of Wales Hospital](#).

Dr Anazodo is conducting a 20 year study into the barriers to fertility treatment of cancer patients and says a major obstacle is there is no Medicare rebate to cover the Annual \$300-\$400 cost of storing sperms and eggs.

“If you’re 15 or 20 when you bank it, you have to pay to store it for 10-15 years,” she said.

On the advice of his doctor Marcus Ehrlich decided to preserve his fertility by storing a sperm deposit before he commenced his cancer treatment before he had cancer treatment.

“It was one of the most awkward experiences of my life,” he says.

“Thirty six hours after they told me I might die in my twenties I was told to go downstairs and do my business. It was surreal,” he said of the experience.

Marcus was not in a relationship at the time. He underwent a punishing round of chemotherapy to kill off his blood cancer but it returned 15 months later.

Fortunately, he had a bone marrow match with his brother and he had a bone-marrow transplant.

“The transplant was highly destructive, there was almost no chance of my fertility recovering after I had it,” he said.

“I had my fertility tested afterwards and it was scorched earth.”

During his cancer treatment Marcus found himself being housed in hospital wards with men who were four or five decades older than him.

“I was in beds next to men my grandfather’s age who were literally dying in front of me, it was an horrific experience,” he says.

And he was recruited by the Sony company to be the face of its philanthropic youth cancer program ‘[You Can](#)’ which has been building specialised youth cancer centres around the country.

Youth cancer centres see young people receive treatment with people at the same life stage, who are going through the same trials and it’s a terrific” morale bond” says Marcus.

Sony company’s You Can project is funding special cancer treatment centres for young people so they don’t have to be housed with the old who are dying during treatment. It was at the launch of the project that Marcus met his wife Kelly who was the public relations manager for the project.

“I sat next to her and that was that,” he says of the love at first sight relationship.

Two years later the couple were married and shortly afterwards decided to begin a family using IVF and the sperm Marcus had stored almost a decade earlier.

“I’ve got to tell you I’m a big fan of science, I was so happy that option was available to me,” he says.



Truly a miracle ... Marcus Ehrlich with his wife Kelly and seven-week-old daughter Winter. Pictures: Justin Lloyd Source: News Corp Australia

“It was amazing I could use sperm from 8-9 years ago to conceive a child almost a decade later,” he says.

Dr Anazodo says men taking part in her study say they didn’t want to discuss cancer’s impact on their fertility.

“They felt it was part of their maleness and their ability to develop relationships and didn’t want to admit it could be a problem,” she said.

This is even though it is much simpler to do fertility preservation in men. In the United States she says some cancer centres are collecting immature sperm from boys younger than 13 using surgery “with the idea in 20 years there may be scientific advances”.

“We’ve got to make sure every person gets access,” she said.

And she has written to the government’s Medicare review asking that a Medicare rebate be made available for storing frozen sperm and eggs from cancer patients.

Marcus says it is a tragedy that some young men don’t think about their fertility before undergoing cancer treatment.

“I think we’ve got to put it front and centre of treatment plans and in many cases I think that is happening now,” he said.

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