

## **Knowledge of infertility low in urban teens**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**TORONTO, September 22, 2008** – A new Sunnybrook study raises concerns that a large percentage of high school students in the Greater Toronto Area lack the knowledge to adequately protect their ability to conceive children in the future.

A first of its kind, the study assesses attitudes and knowledge about factors that can affect future fertility in a diverse North American high school population. Led by noted fertility specialist Dr. Clifford Librach, reproductive endocrinologist at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, and co-investigator, Susan Quach, MSc, the study surveyed 772 grade 11 and 12 students from the Toronto District School Board to gauge their knowledge and attitudes about infertility.

With results collected from one of the largest reported sample sizes for studying infertility knowledge and attitudes in this population, statistics point to a large gap in awareness of the preventable factors that can lead to infertility.

“Although most of the students surveyed reported that protecting their fertility was important to them, the majority were unaware, or knew very little about the preventable factors that can lead to infertility,” reports Dr. Librach, who is also an Associate Professor at University of Toronto in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology. “More than 94 per cent of students surveyed did not know that sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as chlamydia or gonorrhea can lead to infertility. Alarmingly, more than one third of the students did not know that smoking could also affect fertility.”

In North America, approximately one in six couples struggle with infertility and there appears to be a trend towards an even higher incidence. Dr. Librach regularly meets with couples dealing with infertility as a result of their history with STI(s).

“We frequently see women with past STI(s) struggling with infertility due to pelvic scarring and blocked, or non-functional fallopian tubes that can be caused by these infections. These women often report that they were unaware that birth control pills would not protect them from STIs, or that these infections could actually render them infertile,” reports Dr. Librach. “We also see women waiting longer to start their families, not fully realizing the profound effects that age can have on their ability to conceive, their risk of miscarriage and their risk of having a genetically abnormal child.”

The study is the first to compare the effects of socioeconomic status on knowledge and attitudes about infertility. Dr. Librach notes that results of the study show that a greater percentage of students with a low socioeconomic status were unaware of the link between infertility and STIs.

“This is concerning from a public-health perspective because we know there is a well-established link between the prevalence of STIs and socioeconomic status,” says Dr. Librach.

Results also indicate that a greater percentage of male students were unaware of the link between STI’s and infertility.

“Increased efforts are needed to empower young people with the knowledge they need to protect their fertility,” suggests Dr. Librach. “We must better integrate fertility education into our sexual education curriculum, and find ways to better encourage our young people both to protect themselves from sexually transmitted infection and pursue STI screening even if they have no symptoms.”

This study was funded by unrestricted grants from EMD Serono Canada, Organon Canada and Ferring Pharmaceuticals Canada. Results of the study were published in Fertility and Sterility (online) by the American Society for Reproductive Medicine.

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For more information and to obtain a copy of the report, contact:

Laurie Legere  
Communications & Stakeholder Relations  
Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre  
416.480.4040