

FIRST NATIONAL CONSENSUS ON OVARIAN CANCER SYMPTOMS

MOCA salutes the development of the first national consensus statement on ovarian cancer symptoms by the Gynecologic Cancer Foundation, the Society of Gynecologic Oncologists and the American Cancer, which was announced on June 13.

The statement includes the following important message:

Historically, ovarian cancer was often called the “silent killer” due to the common belief that there are no warning signs or symptoms. However, recent studies have shown that this is untrue and that the following symptoms are much more likely to occur in women with ovarian cancer than women in the general population.

These symptoms include

- Bloating
- Pelvic or abdominal pain
- Difficulty eating or feeling full quickly
- Urinary symptoms (urgency or frequency)

Women who experience these symptoms almost daily for more than a few weeks should see their doctor, preferably a gynecologist.

“For the past eight years, MOCA has been devoted to raising awareness of ovarian cancer and promoting the importance of early detection,” explains Minnesota Ovarian Cancer Alliance (MOCA) Executive Director Kathleen Gavin. In just seven years, the organization has awarded \$1.7 for research in Minnesota, making MOCA one of the largest non-governmental funders of ovarian cancer in the nation. Approximately 25% of the awards were given to research projects focusing on earlier detection. MOCA conducts medical education programs throughout the state to increase knowledge about ovarian cancer among health professionals, medical students, women at risk and the general public.

Unlike the Pap smear which screen for cervical cancer and the mammogram for breast cancer, there currently is no consistently reliable test available to detect ovarian cancer in its early stages. However, when detected early and treated properly, more than 90% of the women diagnosed with the disease will survive longer than five years.

OVARIAN CANCER SYMPTOMS CONSENSUS STATEMENT

The Gynecologic Cancer Foundation, the Society of Gynecologic Oncologists and the American Cancer Society led the effort to form a consensus statement on ovarian cancer. Their statement follows.

Historically ovarian cancer was called the “silent killer” because symptoms were not thought to develop until the chance of cure was poor. However, recent studies have shown this term is untrue and that the following symptoms are much more likely to occur in women with ovarian cancer than women in the general population.^{1,2} These symptoms include:

- Bloating
- Pelvic or abdominal pain
- Difficulty eating or feeling full quickly
- Urinary symptoms (urgency or frequency)

Women with ovarian cancer report that symptoms are persistent and represent a change from normal for their bodies. The frequency and/or number of such symptoms are key factors in the diagnosis of ovarian cancer.³ Several studies show that even early stage ovarian cancer can produce these symptoms.^{2,6}

Women who have these symptoms almost daily for more than a few weeks should see their doctor, preferably a gynecologist. Prompt medical evaluation may lead to detection at the earliest possible stage of the disease. Early stage diagnosis is associated with an improved prognosis.

Several other symptoms have been commonly reported by women with ovarian cancer.²⁻⁵ These symptoms include fatigue, indigestion, back pain, pain with intercourse, constipation and menstrual irregularities. However, these other symptoms are not as useful in identifying ovarian cancer because they are also found in equal frequency in women in the general population who do not have ovarian cancer.¹

References

1. Goff BA, Mandel LS, Melancon CH, Muntz HG. Frequency of symptoms of ovarian cancer in women presenting to primary care. *JAMA* 2004;291:2705-12. Level II-2
2. Olson SH, Mignone L, Nakaraseive C, Caputo TA, Barakat RR, Harlap S. Symptoms of ovarian cancer. *Obstet Gynecol* 2001;98:212-7. Level II-2
3. Goff BA, Mandel L, Muntz HG, Melancon CH. Ovarian carcinoma diagnosis: results of a national ovarian cancer survey. *Cancer* 2000;89:2068-75. Level III
4. Vine MF, Ness RB, Calingaert B, Schildkraut JM, Berchuck A. Types and duration of symptoms prior to diagnosis of invasive or borderline ovarian tumor. *Gynecol Oncol* 2001;83:466-71. Level III

Originating Organizations: Date

Gynecologic Cancer Foundation January 23, 2007
Society of Gynecologic Oncologists February 15, 2007
American Cancer Society April 30, 2007

Endorsing Organizations:

CancerCare May 29, 2007
Conversations! The International Newsletter May 29, 2007
For Those Fighting Ovarian Cancer
EyesOnThePrize.org June 1, 2007
FORCE: Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered May 29, 2007
Gilda's Club Worldwide May 29, 2007
Gynecologic Oncology Group May 29, 2007
In My Sister's Care June 5, 2007
International Gynecologic Cancer Society May 30, 2007
Lynn Cohen Foundation for Ovarian Cancer June 4, 2007
Research
National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship June 5, 2007
National Cervical Cancer Coalition May 30, 2007
National Ovarian Cancer Coalition May 31, 2007
Ovarian Cancer Canada June 4, 2007
Ovarian Cancer National Alliance May 29, 2007
Ovarian Cancer Research Fund May 29, 2007
SHARE: Self-help for Women with Breast June 5, 2007
or Ovarian Cancer
Society of Gynecologic Nurse Oncologists May 29, 2007