

Health Awareness

Ovarian Cancer: The Benefits Of Early Detection

(NAPSA)—Many women find that a diagnosis of ovarian cancer can be frightening and overwhelming. Each year, more than 22,000 women in the United States will be diagnosed, with 15,000 potential deaths from the disease.

Part of the challenge is that many symptoms of ovarian cancer can present as other types of seemingly normal digestive or abdominal discomfort, including bloating, gas, nausea or frequent urination, unexplained weight gain or loss, fatigue and changes in bowel habits.

Family History Is Important

The disease often strikes women who are near menopause. A family history of ovarian, breast, endometrial, prostate or colon cancer is an important risk factor, especially if a sister or mother had ovarian cancer. Jewish women and women inheriting a defect in the BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene also have an increased risk.

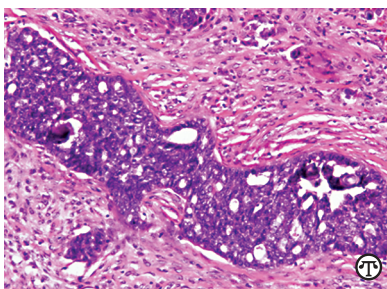
While the five-year survival rate for stage 1 ovarian cancer is approximately 95 percent, the symptoms are often absent or minimal. More than 80 percent of patients with ovarian cancer present with advanced disease—usually stage 3 or 4, where the tumor has spread beyond the ovary and into adjacent structures, which significantly decreases the survival rate.

“Detecting a tumor at an early curable stage would be a major benefit for women afflicted with ovarian cancer,” said Herman S. Hurwitz, M.D., FCAP, senior medical director, Quest Diagnostics Mid-Atlantic Business Unit, Philadelphia campus.

Dr. Hurwitz is a pathologist, a physician who examines cells, bodily fluids, and tissues to diagnose diseases, including ovarian cancer. Pathologists work with the other physicians on a patient's medical team to assist with treatment plans.

Regular Pelvic Exams Are Key

Unfortunately, the goal of a reliable screening test to detect



Ovarian cancer often does not present clear physical symptoms. Early detection would be a major benefit to women afflicted with the disease.

early-stage ovarian cancer remains elusive. Having regular pelvic exams is important for all women. In women who have an abnormal pelvic examination or who are at high risk for developing ovarian cancer, a transvaginal ultrasound and a blood test called CA-125 may also help detect the disease.

A preoperative evaluation can sometimes be uncertain as to whether a pelvic or ovarian mass is malignant or benign. “When the initial presurgical assessment does not indicate malignancy, a new diagnostic tool, OVA1™, is an FDA-cleared qualitative serum test that supplements the traditional clinical evaluation by a pathologist and gynecologist, to help evaluate the probability of whether an ovarian mass is benign or malignant in women over 18 years of age,” said Hurwitz.

CA-125 and another new test, HE4, can be used to monitor for evidence of tumor recurrence following treatment for ovarian cancer. Dr. Hurwitz, like other pathologists, oversees the clinical laboratory that analyzes blood and body fluid samples for tests such as CA-125, HE4 and OVA1.

The College of American Pathologists provides a website to help a woman learn more about her diagnosis. For more information, visit www.MyBiopsy.org.