

Ovarian Cancer Symptoms Consensus Statement

As many of you are aware through stories in the local and national media this week, the Gynecologic Cancer Foundation (GCF) has released a consensus statement on ovarian cancer symptoms. The Gynecologic Cancer Foundation led this effort in response to ovarian cancer survivor advocacy groups that participate in its Allied Support Group.

The consensus statement notes that researchers have documented that the following symptoms are much more likely to occur in women with ovarian cancer than in women in the general population.

Bloating

Pelvic or abdominal pain

Difficulty eating or feeling full quickly

Urinary symptoms (urgency or frequency)

The consensus statement recommends that women who have these symptoms almost daily for more than a few weeks should see their doctor, preferably a gynecologist who will perform a skillful pelvic exam. If a physician believes there is a reasonable concern that ovarian cancer may be present, further evaluation should be performed, including possibly a CA125 and/or pelvic ultrasound. The hope is that greater awareness of ovarian cancer symptoms will enable more cases to be diagnosed at an early stage and that this will translate into an improvement in survival.

After careful consideration, the Society of Gynecologic Oncologists endorsed the ovarian cancer symptoms consensus statement. Although the statement was championed by advocacy groups, the SGO leadership has a strong sense that the vast majority of women with ovarian cancer share the concern that their symptoms did not raise suspicion sooner. Although proof that earlier recognition of symptoms improves outcomes does not yet exist, there is little to be lost and much to be potentially gained by increasing awareness of ovarian cancer symptoms that might lead to earlier medical evaluation and intervention. Although population screening with CA125 and ultrasound has the potential to lead to many false-positive results, their use in the evaluation of a symptomatic woman represents appropriate medical care.

The release of the symptoms consensus statement highlights the close working relationship that has developed between the ovarian cancer advocacy community and the Society of Gynecologic Oncologists and its foundation – the GCF. We believe that this is a natural reflection of the comprehensive care that Gynecologic Oncologists provide to women with ovarian cancer – from surgery to chemotherapy and ongoing follow up. One of the most encouraging aspects of the articles that have been published in the New York Times and other lay press in response to the consensus statement is the recommendation that women with

suspected ovarian cancer are best served by referral to a Gynecologic Oncologist for surgery.

In addition to working for greater recognition of ovarian cancer symptoms, the ovarian cancer advocacy groups under the umbrella of the GCF have worked together productively on other issues of mutual concern. This includes advocating strongly for increased NCI and Department of Defense (DOD) funding of ovarian cancer research and clinical trials. In addition, the Gynecologic Cancer Education and Awareness Act (Johanna's Law) recently was approved by the US Congress, and will provide funding for projects that aim to increase awareness of risk factors and symptoms. When these funds are appropriated and put to work, this likely will provide the opportunity to study further whether broader recognition of symptoms of ovarian cancer with earlier intervention improves outcomes.

The SGO and its members should congratulate and salute our partners in the advocacy community for their incredible dedication to the fight against ovarian cancer.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andy Berchuck". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned to the left of a vertical red line.

Andrew Berchuck, MD
President, Society of Gynecologic Oncologists

Links

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<http://www.wcn.org/interior.cfm?featureid=9&contenttypeid=33&contentid=10750>

Gynecologic Cancer Foundation

<http://www.thegcf.org/>

The Society of Gynecologic Oncologists

<http://www.sgo.org>