

MEDIA RELEASE

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One in five ovarian cancer cases inherited, but GPs left in the dark on family history

- **44 per cent of Australians with family history of breast/ovarian cancer have not discussed their risk with their GPs**
- **Most Australians would want to know if a family member tested positive for a BRCA mutation and would want their family to know if they tested positive**
- **Most Australian women would consider preventative surgery if they tested positive for a BRCA mutation**

A national study of Australians has found that 44 per cent of Australians with a history of breast and/or ovarian cancer in their family have not spoken to their doctor about their family history.

This is despite up to one in five occurrences of ovarian cancer being an inherited form of the disease, often attributed to the BRCA1 and BRCA2 gene mutations that increase a woman's risk of developing ovarian cancer.

CEO of Ovarian Cancer Australia (OCA) Jane Hill said the commissioned study by OCA has revealed alarming results, and has shed light on the attitudes of Australians towards genetic testing and preventative surgery in the lead-up to Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month this February and the launch of OCA's new national awareness initiative, *Know Ovarian Cancer*.

"Know Ovarian Cancer urges Australians to know the signs and symptoms of ovarian cancer, know their family history, and know how to help raise much needed funds," said Ms Hill.

"There is still no early detection test for ovarian cancer, despite there being recent advances in the developmental stages of a test in the UK. Recognising the risks and symptoms of ovarian cancer is key to enabling a timely diagnosis," said Ms Hill.

Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) President Dr Frank R Jones said it was imperative Australian women discussed known family history of breast and/or ovarian cancer with their GP, to ensure their GP could give an appropriate evaluation of their risk of inheriting ovarian cancer.

"Every year, 1480 Australian women are diagnosed with ovarian cancer, and 20 per cent of these women will have inherited the disease," Dr Jones said.

"If a GP is aware of a patient's family history of ovarian and breast cancer, together with the patient, they can make more informed decisions around monitoring, genetic testing and preventative measures.

"This can enable a more timely diagnosis and a better chance of survival."

Ovarian cancer has the lowest survival rate of any women's cancer. If diagnosed in its early stages, women have an 80 per cent chance of being alive and well after five years. Unfortunately, the five-year survival rate is a low 43 per cent, as three-quarters of women with ovarian cancer are diagnosed at an advanced stage.

A woman is considered to have a family history of ovarian cancer if she:

- has a first degree relative diagnosed with breast cancer under the age of 50;
- has a first degree relative diagnosed with ovarian cancer at any age; or
- has a combination of two or more first degree relatives with breast or ovarian cancer.

A previous study by OCA noted that 93 per cent of women with ovarian cancer experienced the known symptoms of the disease, with an average of 3.3 symptoms per respondent, demonstrating that ovarian cancer is not the 'silent killer' as once thought. The common symptoms are abdominal or pelvic pain; increased abdominal size or persistent abdominal bloating; the need to urinate often or urgently; and feeling full after eating a small amount.

The study also found that over 75 per cent of Australians would want to know if a family member tested positive for the BRCA1 and BRCA2 gene mutations, and similarly, 80 per cent of Australians would want other family members to know if they themselves tested positive.

Over 75 per cent of Australian women indicated that they would consider preventative surgery involving removal of ovaries if they tested positive to the gene mutations. This applied to over half of women aged 18-34 and increased to almost 90 per cent for women aged 50+.

"During Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month this February, make sure you know ovarian cancer. It might just save your life, or the life of someone you love," said Ms Hill.

"One in five Australians know someone who has been diagnosed with ovarian cancer, and 154,000 Australians are connected to ovarian cancer each year. Every Australian needs to know this disease. It touches too many of us," she continued.

OCA is calling upon all Australians to help by bringing together family, friends and colleagues for an *Afternoon Teal* – teal being the international colour for ovarian cancer – to raise money and discuss the symptoms, risks and impacts of ovarian cancer.

Hosts can register their Afternoon Teal by visiting www.afternoontea.net.au or by emailing afternoontea@ovariancancer.net.au

Australians can also raise funds by wearing a Teal Ribbon throughout February – particularly on *Teal Ribbon Day, 24th February 2016* – by purchasing a Teal Ribbon from Principal Partner Chemmart Pharmacies nationwide or from www.ovariancancer.net.au

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About Ovarian Cancer Australia:

Ovarian Cancer Australia is the independent national organisation that takes action for people affected by ovarian cancer and was founded in 2001 by a group of people who had been affected by ovarian cancer, either themselves or through someone they loved. Ovarian Cancer Australia provides support for women and their families, raises community awareness of ovarian cancer, advocates for improved services for women and promotes and funds research. Ovarian Cancer Australia's vision is to save lives and ensure that no woman with ovarian cancer walks alone. Their work is guided by their core values of Optimism, Community and Accountability. In February 2015, Ovarian Cancer Australia announced their bold 25/25 Vision, a plan to achieve a 25 per cent improvement in the five year survival rate of ovarian cancer by 2025. Know Ovarian Cancer is an initiative to achieve the 25/25 Vision, consisting of a national awareness campaign, education and support programs, high impact research, and advocacy. For more information on the 25/25 Vision, please visit www.ovariancancer.net.au/2525vision