



MEDIA RELEASE

Embargoed 22 February 2017

Alarming findings from national study into Australians' understanding of ovarian cancer

- ***70 per cent do not know ovarian cancer is symptomatic***
- ***More than 50 per cent of Australian women incorrectly believe that the pap smear can detect ovarian cancer***

Australians have a poor understanding of ovarian cancer, with a new study commissioned by Ovarian Cancer Australia revealing that almost 70 per cent of Australians do not know that ovarian cancer exhibits symptoms.

Ovarian Cancer Australia's CEO Jane Hill said the study's findings were of grave concern.

"Being aware of, and recognising, the symptoms of ovarian cancer are vital if women are to receive a timely diagnosis and have the greatest possible chance for survival," Ms Hill said.

"Today is Teal Ribbon Day, the national day on which we remember those who have lost their lives to ovarian cancer and encourage Australians to wear a teal ribbon to raise awareness of ovarian cancer. The findings of this study show just how important it is that we continue to raise awareness of this disease."

Ovarian cancer claims the lives of 1,200 Australian women every year; it has the lowest survival rate of any women's cancer. This year 1,550 women are expected to be diagnosed with the disease. Women have an 80 per cent chance of being alive and well five years post diagnosis if the disease is caught in its early stages, however 75 per cent of women are diagnosed in advanced stages when it is difficult to treat successfully.

"All Australians need to know the main symptoms of ovarian cancer, which are abdominal or pelvic pain, increased abdominal size or persistent abdominal bloating, the need to urinate often or urgently, or feeling full after eating a small amount," Ms Hill said.

"More than 90 per cent of women diagnosed with ovarian cancer experience one or more of the known symptoms in the lead up to their diagnosis. It is imperative you don't ignore the signs and consult your GP if you are experiencing these symptoms for four weeks or more," she continued.

Ms Hill said Australians were also in the dark when it comes to their understanding of early detection tests and survival rates.

"There is no early detection test for ovarian cancer. It is staggering that more than half of Australian women incorrectly believe that the pap smear can detect ovarian cancer.

"The misconceptions of ovarian cancer also extend to chances of survival. Only 18 per cent of Australians know that ovarian cancer's survival rates are dismal and that most women diagnosed will not survive.

"The five-year survival rate of ovarian cancer is 43 per cent, which is well below the average for all cancers," Ms Hill continued.

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The study also revealed that only one-third of Australian women have spoken to family members about their family history of ovarian and breast cancer.

“Up to one in five occurrences of ovarian cancer are attributed to genetics and family history, so don’t put off the conversation,” Ms Hill said.

“There is a link between ovarian and breast cancer owing to the BRCA gene mutations, so make sure you know your family history of both cancers.

“With this information you can talk to your GP about strategies such as surveillance and increased monitoring or preventive measures,” she said.

This Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month, Ovarian Cancer Australia launched its #KnowAskAct campaign.

“For the month of February, we are encouraging all Australians to #KnowAskAct. That is, know the signs and symptoms of ovarian cancer, ask for medical advice if you do have these symptoms, and act to improve the lives of women living with ovarian cancer by donating to Ovarian Cancer Australia or hosting an Afternoon Teal fundraising event,” Ms Hill said. Teal is the international colour for ovarian cancer.

All Australians can show their support for women living with ovarian cancer by purchasing and wearing a teal ribbon, particularly on Teal Ribbon Day, Wednesday 22nd February, 2017. Teal ribbons are available for \$2 from Chemmart Pharmacies, Terry White Chemists, or Chemplus stores nationally, as well as from www.ovariancancer.net.au

The four key symptoms of ovarian cancer 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.**

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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. It provides support to 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.