Global survey reveals delayed diagnosis of ovarian cancer in Australia

- Study shows diagnosis of ovarian cancer in Australian women is delayed 32.5 weeks
- Australian women have a longer time to diagnosis in comparison to women in Germany, Japan and Spain
- Most comprehensive survey of ovarian cancer patients ever undertaken suggests raising awareness of the disease could improve outcomes for women

A global study released today has revealed that it takes an estimated 32.5 weeks for Australian women experiencing the symptoms of ovarian cancer to be diagnosed with the disease.

The review by World Ovarian Cancer Coalition, known as the Every Woman Study, is the largest ever survey of the experiences of women living with ovarian cancer. More than 100 Australian women participated in the Study.

The Study also found that two thirds of women with ovarian cancer either had not heard of the disease, or did not know anything about it before their diagnosis. Although nine out of ten had experienced symptoms prior to diagnosis, fewer than half of those women visited a doctor within a month of noticing symptoms.

On average more than half of women surveyed had undergone genetic testing either before or after diagnosis.

CEO of Ovarian Cancer Australia and non-executive Director of the World Ovarian Cancer Coalition Jane Hill said the results of the survey are alarming.

“We wanted to find out more about the experiences of women with ovarian cancer and identify what needs to be done right now to tackle this marginalised cancer. The results show that this is a global challenge that can only be taken on by the whole community,” Ms Hill said.

“Too many women are being diagnosed far too late. Too many hadn’t even heard of the disease. The Study highlights low levels of awareness of ovarian cancer as a global problem resulting in delays in women seeking medical attention,” Ms Hill added.

Diane Gardiner AM was diagnosed with ovarian cancer four years ago. She was among the 100 plus Australian women who participated in the Study.

“The symptoms of ovarian cancer are sometimes vague and can easily be dismissed as ‘women’s problems’,” Ms Gardiner said.

“More needs to be done to raise awareness of ovarian cancer globally, including among GPs. It took numerous trips to the GP for over six months until I was diagnosed with stage 3C ovarian cancer in hospital,” Ms Gardiner added.

Every year in Australia, approximately 1,600 women are diagnosed with ovarian cancer and more than 1,000 will succumb to the disease. Sadly, 75 per cent of Australian women are diagnosed in advanced stages.
Around the world, approximately 239,000 women are diagnosed with ovarian cancer each year and less than half will survive to five years. Studies have shown that around 15 per cent of women die within two months of their diagnosis, with age, emergency presentation and co-morbidities placing them at increased risk.

“Globally, the survey revealed diagnosis took an estimated average of 31 weeks from a woman experiencing symptoms to her diagnosis; for one in ten women diagnosis came more than a year after visiting a doctor. In Australia, women had a longer time to diagnosis compared to women in Germany, Japan and Spain - but high rates of surgery,” Ms Hill said.

“To enable a more timely diagnosis we implore all Australians to know the signs and symptoms of ovarian cancer. It may just save a life.

“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,” Ms Hill concluded.

The Every Woman Study is an initiative of the World Ovarian Cancer Coalition. The evidence will form the basis of the World Ovarian Cancer Coalition’s future strategy and priorities.

Following a survey of members about their priorities for action, a series of interviews among women and clinicians in 16 countries was conducted, as well as desk research. The findings formed the basis of the Every Woman Study Online Survey, completed by 1531 women in 44 countries between March and May 2018.

All reports will be available at www.worldovariancancercoalition.org

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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 a loved one. 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 high impact research. Ovarian Cancer Australia’s vision is to save lives and ensure that no woman with ovarian cancer walks alone. Ovarian Cancer Australia is a member of the World Ovarian Cancer Coalition, which works to raise awareness of ovarian cancer on a global scale.
About the World Ovarian Cancer Coalition
The World Ovarian Cancer Coalition works with 135 individual partner patient advocacy organizations from 37 countries around the world.

Every Woman Study – Expert Advisory Panel
Dr Neerja Bhatla – Co-Chair, India
Annwen Jones – Co-Chair and World Ovarian Cancer Coalition Board member, UK
Dr Tracey Adams – South Africa
Amanda Benites – Patient Representative, Brazil
Dr Stephanie Blank – USA
Robin Cohen – Nurse representative and World Ovarian Cancer Coalition Board Member, USA
Diane Gardiner – Patient Representative, Australia
Sylvia Gregory – Patient Representative, Italy
Professor Amit Oza – Clinical Lead, Canada
Makiko Suzuki – Patient Representative, Japan