

Ovarian Cancer: The Silent Disease

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PEORIA - September is Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month. Ovarian cancer is a tough disease to diagnose because the signs and symptoms aren't always as obvious as some other types of cancer. For example, bloating and abdominal pain are symptoms of ovarian cancer, but can often be confused with constipation. For years, ovarian cancer was known as a "silent" disease.

"That's been the challenging part of ovarian cancer -- it usually presents at an advanced stage because the symptoms are so vague and may represent another clinical condition," says Dr. Christina Kramer, OB/GYN for OSF HealthCare.

“Ovarian cancer is a cancer that arises from the ovaries or the female reproductive organs and it can occur in women at any age group – premenopausal, perimenopausal or postmenopausal women,” says Dr. Kramer. “How it presents is a little bit different for different age groups and it will be most common in a postmenopausal patient.”

According to the American Cancer Society, about 21,000 women will be diagnosed with ovarian cancer this year. Ovarian cancer ranks fifth in cancer deaths among women, which is more deaths than any other cancer of the female reproductive system. About half of the women diagnosed with ovarian cancer are 63 years or older. It is more common in white women than African American women.

“Typical symptoms would be abdominal pain, pelvic pain, bloating, changes in bowel or urinary habits, and unfortunately all of these are late signs indicating the tumor has spread beyond the ovaries at that point,” says Dr. Kramer. “However, in women who are at a higher risk based on a family history or a particular genetic mutation, we may see a lesion or an abnormal cyst on an ultrasound, where we can maybe catch a lesion at an earlier stage.”

Among the risk factors for ovarian cancer include age, family history, having a genetic mutation or having breast, uterine or colon cancer.

“Risk factors for ovarian cancer include a family history of breast or ovarian cancer,” says Dr. Kramer. “Sometimes that makes us question whether there is a genetic mutation. Other risk factors are anything that would allow a woman to have more ovulatory events in her life – early onset of menses, fewer pregnancies, shorter duration of breastfeeding and later menopause are other risk factors.”

Treatment options include surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy among others. Dr. Kramer says her best advice to anyone with concerns, is to consult with their doctor.

“The hard part is if there is ever a concern – I have a lot of patients say something just doesn’t feel right trust your gut instinct on that one and go in and get evaluated,” she says.

For more information, visit [OSF HealthCare](#).