



Georgia Ovarian  
Cancer Alliance

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**THE OVARIAN CANCER NATIONAL ALLIANCE'S STATEMENT  
ON THE FIRST NATIONAL CONSENSUS  
ON OVARIAN CANCER'S SYMPTOMS**

***The Ovarian Cancer National Alliance has issued the following statement concerning the first national consensus on ovarian cancer symptoms that was released today. This statement is from Executive Director Sherry Salway Black.***

The Ovarian Cancer National Alliance salutes the development of the first national consensus statement on ovarian cancer symptoms. The Alliance has advocated for a consensus statement on symptoms ever since the organization's founding in 1997. The Alliance was created to advance research through advocacy and increase awareness about symptoms so that women would seek and receive treatment earlier.

Unfortunately, the ovarian cancer survivor community's insistence about symptoms has long been dismissed by the medical community. We are proud that founders of the Ovarian Cancer National Alliance have been the catalyst for changing this thinking.

In the late 1990s, Dr. Barbara Goff, a gynecologic oncologist at the University of Washington, worked hand-in-hand with one of our co-founders, the late Cindy Melancon, to develop and disseminate a symptoms survey in Cindy's ovarian cancer survivors' newsletter. The results dispelled the myth that ovarian cancer has no symptoms. In fact, most of the survivors surveyed reported symptoms, even in the early stages. That is critical information for women and healthcare practitioners to know because when diagnosed early, nine out of 10 women will survive for more than five years.

Last year, another Alliance co-founder, Pamela Faerber, directly asked national cancer organizations to form a consensus statement – not just in response to our survivors' insistence, but also to provide consistency in describing symptoms to make it easier for women to learn and remember them. Pam made her request to a group of organizations convened by the Gynecologic Cancer Foundation during the Alliance's September 2006 conference. During the conference, participants expressed concern to an American Cancer Society official that ACS did not even have a brochure about ovarian cancer's symptoms. During our next national conference in Washington, D.C., this July, hundreds of ovarian cancer advocates will be discussing how to make this information more widespread.

The Alliance is the national umbrella organization representing 50 local, state and national ovarian cancer survivor and advocacy groups. We speak for the 172,000 survivors living in the United States. On behalf of all of them, we are pleased that our advocacy as survivors has led to this consensus statement. This will help both women and medical professionals know that symptoms exist, even in the early stages.



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It is important to note that ovarian cancer is the deadliest of the gynecologic cancers and ranks fifth in cancer deaths among women. Contrary to popular opinion, a Pap smear does not test for ovarian cancer – it is a screening for cervical cancer. There is no reliable screening test for ovarian cancer, making information and knowledge about symptoms even more critical.

## OVARIAN CANCER SYMPTOMS CONSENSUS STATEMENT

*The Gynecologic Cancer Foundation, the Society of Gynecologic Oncologists and the American Cancer Society led the effort to form a consensus statement on ovarian cancer. Their statement follows.*

Historically ovarian cancer was called the “silent killer” because symptoms were not thought to develop until the chance of cure was poor. However, recent studies have shown this term is untrue and that the following symptoms are much more likely to occur in women with ovarian cancer than women in the general population.<sup>1,2</sup> These symptoms include:

- Bloating
- Pelvic or abdominal pain
- Difficulty eating or feeling full quickly
- Urinary symptoms (urgency or frequency)

Women with ovarian cancer report that symptoms are persistent and represent a change from normal for their bodies. The frequency and/or number of such symptoms are key factors in the diagnosis of ovarian cancer.<sup>3</sup> Several studies show that even early stage ovarian cancer can produce these symptoms.<sup>2-6</sup>

Women who have these symptoms almost daily for more than a few weeks should see their doctor, preferably a gynecologist. Prompt medical evaluation may lead to detection at the earliest possible stage of the disease. Early stage diagnosis is associated with an improved prognosis.

Several other symptoms have been commonly reported by women with ovarian cancer.<sup>2-5</sup> These symptoms include fatigue, indigestion, back pain, pain with intercourse, constipation and menstrual irregularities. However, these other symptoms are not as useful in identifying ovarian cancer because they are also found in equal frequency in women in the general population who do not have ovarian cancer.<sup>1</sup>

### References

1. Goff BA, Mandel LS, Melancon CH, Muntz HG. Frequency of symptoms of ovarian cancer in women presenting to primary care. *JAMA* 2004;291:2705-12. Level II-2
2. Olson SH, Mignone L, Nakaraseive C, Caputo TA, Barakat RR, Harlap S. Symptoms of ovarian cancer. *Obstet Gynecol* 2001;98:212-7. Level II-2



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3. Goff BA, Mandel L, Muntz HG, Melancon CH. Ovarian carcinoma diagnosis: results of a national ovarian cancer survey. *Cancer* 2000;89:2068-75. Level III
4. Vine MF, Ness RB, Calingaert B, Schildkraut JM, Berchuck A. Types and duration of symptoms prior to diagnosis of invasive or borderline ovarian tumor. *Gynecol Oncol* 2001;83:466-71. Level III

**Originating Organizations: Date**

Gynecologic Cancer Foundation January 23, 2007  
Society of Gynecologic Oncologists February 15, 2007  
American Cancer Society April 30, 2007

**Endorsing Organizations:**

CancerCare May 29, 2007  
Conversations! The International Newsletter May 29, 2007  
For Those Fighting Ovarian Cancer  
EyesOnThePrize.org June 1, 2007  
FORCE: Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered May 29, 2007  
Gilda's Club Worldwide May 29, 2007  
Gynecologic Oncology Group May 29, 2007  
In My Sister's Care June 5, 2007  
International Gynecologic Cancer Society May 30, 2007  
Lynn Cohen Foundation for Ovarian Cancer June 4, 2007  
Research  
National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship June 5, 2007  
National Cervical Cancer Coalition May 30, 2007  
National Ovarian Cancer Coalition May 31, 2007  
Ovarian Cancer Canada June 4, 2007  
Ovarian Cancer National Alliance May 29, 2007  
Ovarian Cancer Research Fund May 29, 2007  
SHARE: Self-help for Women with Breast June 5, 2007  
or Ovarian Cancer  
Society of Gynecologic Nurse Oncologists May 29, 2007