

For Immediate Release

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## **The Gynecologic Cancer Foundation Announces First National Consensus on Ovarian Cancer Symptoms**

### ***Symptoms Education Imperative for Earlier Diagnosis***

Chicago, June 13, 2007--- The Gynecologic Cancer Foundation (GCF) today announces the first national consensus on ovarian cancer symptoms. Often referred to as the “silent killer” due to the common belief that there are no warning signs or symptoms, ovarian cancer is the most deadly reproductive cancer.

The Gynecologic Cancer Foundation led this effort to form a consensus in response to ovarian cancer survivors who long held the belief that there were common symptoms of ovarian cancer. Researchers, including Dr. Barbara Goff, a gynecologic oncologist at the University of Washington, have conducted conclusive research that demonstrates that the following symptoms are much more likely to occur in women with ovarian cancer than women in the general population. These symptoms include:

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

Women who have these symptoms almost daily for more than a few weeks should see their doctor, preferably a gynecologist. “This agreement on common symptoms of ovarian cancer hopefully will lead to earlier diagnosis when a cure is more likely,” said Dr. Goff. “We know that when women are diagnosed in Stage I of the disease, it is 90% curable. Unfortunately, until now there has been no agreement on common symptoms, allowing women to go undiagnosed, despite visits to the doctor, until it was too late.”

Unlike cervical cancer, there is no screening test for ovarian cancer, making symptom recognition and regular pelvic examinations the primary ways to detect the cancer early.

It is estimated that more than 22,000 women will be told they have ovarian cancer this year and more than 15,000 will die from this deadly cancer. Ovarian cancer ranks fifth in cancer deaths among women. At present, about 80% of these cancers are not diagnosed in their early stages, leading to a reduced chance of survival.

In May 2007 GCF conducted a nationwide poll to determine how best to make women aware of this new consensus regarding ovarian cancer symptoms. The poll revealed that while women agree that it is important to know the symptoms

of ovarian cancer, 65 percent say that they do not know enough about the disease. Over 90 percent of the women polled say that they get their most valuable health information from friends or family, and their personal experience with a disease. Advertising by advocacy organizations like GCF, brochures in medical offices and the Internet also rank high.

“Now that there is agreement about the symptoms of ovarian cancer, we must get this information in the hands of every woman and front-line physician” said Pam Faerber, a 13-year ovarian cancer survivor. “We have debunked the myth that this disease is a ‘silent killer,’ and both physicians and women need to act based on this knowledge. When a woman visits a doctor complaining of these symptoms, ovarian cancer must be considered,” she said.

“GCF is grateful to the many professional and advocacy organizations, and survivors who made this consensus a reality,” said Karl C. Podratz, MD, PhD, GCF chairman. “At GCF we say that where there is knowledge, there is hope, and the early diagnosis of ovarian cancer gives women hope for a cure.” Women are encouraged to visit the Women’s Cancer Network ([www.wcn.org](http://www.wcn.org)) to take a risk assessment and to learn more about women’s cancers.

The Gynecologic Cancer Foundation (GCF) is a 501(c) 3 not-for-profit organization whose mission is to ensure public awareness of gynecologic cancer prevention, early diagnosis and proper treatment. In addition, the Foundation supports research and training related to gynecologic cancers. GCF advances this mission by increasing public and private funds that aid in the development and implementation of programs to meet these goals.

### **Ovarian Cancer Consensus Statement Symptoms Originating**

#### **Organizations:**

Gynecologic Cancer Foundation, Society of Gynecologic Oncologists, American Cancer Society

### **Ovarian Cancer Consensus Statement Symptoms Endorsing**

#### **Organizations:**

CancerCare, Conversations: The International Newsletter For Those Fighting Ovarian Cancer, EyesOnThePrize.org, FORCE: Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered, Gilda’s Club Worldwide, Gynecologic Oncology Group, In My Sister’s Care, International Gynecologic Cancer Society, Lynne Cohen Foundation for Ovarian Cancer Research, National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship, National Cervical Cancer Coalition, National Ovarian Cancer Coalition, Ovarian Cancer Canada, Ovarian Cancer National Alliance, Ovarian Cancer Research Fund, SHARE: Self-help for Women with Breast or Ovarian Cancer, Society of Gynecologic Nurse Oncologists

## Ovarian Cancer Symptoms Consensus Statement

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
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
5. Yawn BP, Barrette, BA, Wollan, PC. Ovarian cancer: the neglected diagnosis. *Mayo Clin Proc* 2004;79:1277-1282. Level III
6. Goff BA, Mandel L, Drescher CW, Urban N, Gough S, Schurman K, Patras J, Mahony BS, Anderson M. Development of an ovarian cancer symptom index. *Cancer* 2007;109:221-7. Level II-2

**Originating Organizations:**

Gynecologic Cancer Foundation  
Society of Gynecologic Oncologists  
American Cancer Society

**Date**

January 23, 2007  
February 15, 2007  
April 30, 2007

**Endorsing Organizations:**

CancerCare	May 29, 2007
Conversations: The International Newsletter For Those Fighting Ovarian Cancer	May 29, 2007
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
Lynne Cohen Foundation for Ovarian Cancer Research	June 4, 2007
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 or Ovarian Cancer	June 5, 2007
Society of Gynecologic Nurse Oncologists	May 29, 2007

**Additional Endorsing Organizations**

Alliance for Women's Cancer Awareness	July 3, 2007
Cancer Awareness Team, Akron, Ohio	July 20, 2007
Marsha Rivkin Center for Ovarian Cancer Research	June 18, 2007
Minnesota Ovarian Cancer Alliance	June 20, 2007
Oasis of Southern California	June 20, 2007
Ovar'Coming Together	June 20, 2007
Ovarian and Breast Cancer Alliance of Washington	June 20, 2007
Ovarian Awareness of Kentucky	June 20, 2007
Ovarian Cancer Alliance of FL	June 22, 2007
Ovarian Cancer Alliance of FL – Gulf Coast	June 21, 2007
Ovarian Cancer Alliance of FL/Space Coast	June 21, 2007
Ovarian Cancer Alliance of Oregon and SW Washington	June 25, 2007
Ovarian Cancer Orange County Alliance	June 28, 2007
R.O.A.R! (Responsible Ovarian Awareness Required)	June 22, 2007
R.O.C.C.S. Research for Ovarian Cancer and Continued Survival	June 20, 2007
Sandy Rollman Ovarian Cancer Foundation, Inc	June 20, 2007

St. Louis Ovarian Cancer Awareness	June 22, 2007
The Chicago Ovarian Cancer Alliance	June 25, 2007
The Ovarian and Gynecologic Cancer Coalition/Rhonda's Club	June 25, 2007
Treasure Coast Ovarian Cancer Alliance	June 24, 2007
Tri-State Ovarian Cancer Alliance	June 20, 2007