

REDUCING THE BURDEN OF OVARIAN CANCER

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

- Ovarian cancer is the fifth most common cancer and fourth leading cause of death for women.
- In 2004, an estimated 25,580 new cases of ovarian cancer cases will be diagnosed in this country and 16,090 women will die of the disease. Currently, half the women diagnosed with ovarian cancer die from the disease within 5 years.
- Only about 25% of ovarian cancers are diagnosed at an early stage. About 60% of cases are diagnosed after the cancer has spread, when the 5-year survival rate is close to 30%. When detected early, the 5-year survival rate increases to 95%.
- A reliable screening test, which is an important tool for improving early diagnosis rates, does not exist for ovarian cancer.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

Since 2000, congressional funding has allowed CDC to develop public health activities aimed at reducing ovarian cancer morbidity and mortality. To identify unmet public health needs, CDC convened a workshop in 2000, entitled "Identifying Public Health Opportunities to Reduce the Burden of Ovarian Cancer." Attendees included leaders from state health departments and ovarian cancer advocacy groups, as well as physicians and scientists from federal agencies, medical centers, and cancer treatment programs. These experts agreed that although a satisfactory screening test for ovarian cancer was not yet available, there were important opportunities to reduce illness and death caused by the disease. A copy of the workshop report is available at www.cdc.gov/cancer/ovarian/index.htm. Information developed at this workshop is being used annually to guide several CDC ovarian cancer research and health communication activities.

Example of Program in Action

Several studies are being conducted at CDC-funded Prevention Research Centers. These include multi-year research projects at the Centers for Health Promotion and Prevention Research at the University of Texas in Houston and at the University of Alabama in Birmingham. The primary objective of these studies is to identify factors that distinguish women in whom ovarian cancer is diagnosed at stages 1 and 2 from those diagnosed at a later stage. Additional multi-year projects were funded at the Center for Health Promotion and Prevention Research at the University of Texas in Houston and at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center in Oklahoma City. The objective of these two studies is to examine the barriers to ovarian cancer diagnosis and treatment. Identification of factors that can lead to earlier diagnosis is crucial in the development of programs to increase long-term survival rates

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

In 2003, CDC funded Alabama, Colorado, and West Virginia to implement ovarian cancer activities that were identified and prioritized in their comprehensive cancer control plans. All three programs are working to develop ovarian cancer health messages for healthcare providers and the public. With additional funding, CDC will help more states create effective ovarian cancer prevention activities, support research efforts to better understand which populations are most affected by ovarian cancer and why, and evaluate the access and capacity of providers who treat ovarian cancer. CDC will develop health communication messages to provide appropriate education and information about ovarian cancer to physicians and healthcare providers.

For additional information on this or other CDC programs, visit www.cdc.gov/program

January 2004