

OVARIAN CANCER LESS DEADLY THAN PREVIOUSLY THOUGHT

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Patients and physicians commonly perceive ovarian cancer as a highly fatal disease. Since about 60% of patients present with advanced stage disease, the prognosis is often poor. Yet some women are known to survive for many years after diagnosis. Dr. Rosemary Cress of the Public Health Institute's Cancer Registry of Greater California, a SEER registry, collaborated with researchers from UC Davis to compare characteristics of women who survived more than 10 years after diagnosis to those with shorter survival using patients identified through the California Cancer Registry. Patients diagnosed between 1994 and 2001, with follow up through 2011, were included. Of 11,541 women identified, 3,582 (31%) survived over 10 years. Long-term survivors were more likely to be younger and to have early stage, non-serous, and lower grade tumors, but a substantial number of survivors were older or had other characteristics of poor prognosis. Nearly a third of long term survivors had Stage III or IV cancers.

Survival for all stages is slowly improving possibly because of advances in treatment such as improved surgical methods and intraperitoneal chemotherapy. There also is likely some biologic variability among tumors that needs to be further understood. Further research is needed to include more detailed treatment information as well as genomic analysis of tumor tissue.

Results of this study provide hope to newly diagnosed patients and can be useful for counseling patients that although ovarian cancer is a dangerous cancer it is not uniformly fatal, even at an advanced stage.

An article based on the study has been published in the Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology. The article has produced a great deal of media attention and has been featured in MSN: <http://a.msn.com/05/en-us/BBIEqNG?ocid=se> and the Huffington Post: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/news/ovarian-cancer/>. The results of this study were newsworthy because most studies do not have the resources to follow patients for a long period of time after diagnosis. Once again, such important research could not be accomplished without the careful and high quality work of hospital registrars and state and regional registry staff.