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IN BRIEF

Testing for Ovarian Cancer

Recent publicity about symptoms of ovarian cancer will prompt many questions from patients about testing for the disease. Early-stage epithelial ovarian cancer is potentially curable, with survival rates of 90-95%, but about 75% of women have advanced or metastatic disease at diagnosis. Between physical examination and exploratory surgery, 2 tests are commonly used.¹

Transvaginal ultrasound (TVUS) images the ovaries better than transabdominal ultrasound. In a study in which 25,327 asymptomatic women were screened with TVUS annually from 1987 to 2005, 364 patients had exploratory surgery, and 44 had primary ovarian cancer: 28 had stage I, 8 had stage II, and 8 had stage III disease. The most common finding among those who did not have cancer was ovarian serous cystadenoma. Screening with TVUS had a sensitivity of 85.0% and a specificity of 98.7%.²

Serum concentrations of the tumor marker CA-125 are not elevated in 20-50% of women with early disease and are elevated in many noncancerous conditions, including menstruation and uterine fibroids. In one study screening 22,000 postmenopausal women, the sensitivity of serial tests in detecting ovarian cancer was 86% with a specificity of 98%; the sensitivity of a single CA-125 determination was only 62%.³ In a prospective study screening 6,537 postmenopausal women with serial CA-125 determinations, the specificity was 99.8%; only 16 women underwent surgery and 4 of them had ovarian cancer.⁴

A controlled trial screening for ovarian cancer with both TVUS and CA-125 measurements is underway in the UK.⁵ The specificity and sensitivity of either one or both of these tests in detecting early-stage ovarian cancer in women who present with symptoms remain to be established.

1. GD Aletti et al. Current management strategies for ovarian cancer. *Mayo Clin Proc* 2007; 82:751.
2. JR van Nagell et al. Ovarian cancer screening with annual transvaginal sonography: findings of 25,000 women screened. *Cancer* 2007; 109:1887.
3. SJ Skates et al. Calculation of the risk of ovarian cancer from serial CA-125 values for preclinical detection in postmenopausal women. *J Clin Oncol* 2003; 21 suppl 10:206s.

4. U Menon et al. Prospective study using the risk of ovarian cancer algorithm to screen for ovarian cancer. *J Clin Oncol* 2005; 23:7919.
5. UK collaborative trial of ovarian cancer screening. Available at www.ukctocs.org.uk. Accessed June 25, 2007.

Coming Soon in *The Medical Letter*:

Lisdexamfetamine dimesylate (*Vyvanse*) for ADHD
Lybrel — A New Contraceptive Pill
Lapatinib (*Tykerb*) for Breast Cancer

Coming Soon in *Treatment Guidelines*:

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