



Ovarian cancer symptoms awareness: Information for health professionals

About us

Ovacome are the UK support, information and advocacy charity for those affected by ovarian cancer. Established in 1996, Ovacome supports thousands of people each year whose lives have been affected by the disease. Ovacome is run by qualified health care professionals, and takes its role in raising awareness seriously. The information contained below is based on the highest quality research available, and is in concordance with the DoH Cancer reform programme. References are provided. For further information about the charity, or the BEAT campaign, please call us.

Ovarian cancer symptoms awareness

There are many myths about ovarian cancer – one of the most damaging being that symptoms only present in advanced disease. In fact 89% of women at stage 1 and 2 experienced symptoms of the disease. (Goff 2004)

In 2008 Ovacome, in collaboration with the Eve appeal convened the UK's first consensus meeting on the signs and symptoms of ovarian cancer. Up until that point, there was no cross community agreement on the presentation of the disease. The Department of Health, Royal colleges, professional organizations and all charities concerned attended. The resultant document (Ovacome) was used as a foundation for the DoH key messages which were distributed last year. (DoH)

Ovacome have designed the BEAT campaign as a method for making these key messages easier to understand.

B - is for Bloating - it's persistent and doesn't come and go

E - is for Eating less - difficulty eating and feeling full more quickly than you used to

A - is for Abdominal and pelvic pain you feel most days

T - is for Talking; tell your GP

As a rule of thumb, if women regularly experience any of the three BEAT signs of ovarian cancer most days – and that this is not normal for her – she should see her GP. It is unlikely that these symptoms are caused by the disease, but it is important to get ovarian cancer ruled out.

The campaign has been adopted across the English speaking world.

The other charities Ovacome is working with are:

Ovarian Cancer National Alliance, (US)

Ovarian Cancer Canada

Silver Ribbon Foundation, New Zealand

Ovarian Cancer Australia.

These charities will use the BEAT checklist to develop their own national campaigns.

Professor Mike Richards, National Cancer director has added his support to the campaign saying "I warmly welcome Overcome's BEAT symptoms awareness campaign. We know that public awareness of the symptoms of ovarian cancer is currently low. I very much hope that this campaign will lead to earlier diagnosis of ovarian cancer thereby saving women's lives."

How Primary Care can help

We fully appreciate that ovarian cancer is a rarity in everyday practice. It is estimated that a GP will see a case every 5 years. We make this clear to our members and in our press briefings, HOWEVER on the other hand our 2006 survey of 400 women (the largest ever survey of women with ovarian cancer in the UK) demonstrated a patient delay of 5 weeks and a primary care delay of 12. The average number of visits was 4 before an appropriate referral. In over a third of cases, the diagnosis was made elsewhere (A&E, Gastroenterology etc)

The recent Eurocare data tells us that whilst the UK has poor 5 year survival against the European average, we have even worse 1 year survival. This is indicative of late diagnosis. Professor Colman estimates that around 500 more women each year die from ovarian cancer than would have done so if they had lived in some of the better performing EU states

One of the key stumbling blocks that we have identified is the issue of the differential diagnosis. In many cases, women were reluctant to go back to their GP having been told that their symptoms were due to something else. The women needed the surgery to be more proactive about coming back if things didn't improve. As one woman put it – "If the tablets didn't work, I guess I was just going to have to get on with it"

To help resolve these issues, Ovacome are doing several things.

- A PR and general awareness campaign.
- Wide distribution of BEAT materials
- A GP surgery poster, specifically sending the message that the practice **want to know**.
- Ovacome also have trained volunteers who may be available to attend GP education events.

Ovacome invite you to become a BEAT friendly surgery. In doing so you will be showing your community that you care, that you welcome discussion on the subject.

Ovacome will be heralding practices with a wall of honour on its website. To join all you need do is

- Display the poster
- Phone us on 0207 299 6651 or email us on ovacome@ovacome.org.uk and ask to be added

You may wish to discuss the campaign during you practice meetings or suggest Ovacome as supporters of your training activities.

Thank you for your support!

Louise Bayne
CEO
Ovacome

References

Ovacome 2008 - http://www.ovacome.org.uk/media/10858/consensus_statement.pdf

DoH – 2009

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_110534

Goff 2004 - <http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/full/291/22/2705>