

10 Things I Want You to Know About Ovarian Cancer

Description

By [Diane Powis, Ph.D.](#), Chief Spokeswoman at Aspira Women's Health

In 2013, I was completely blindsided with a diagnosis of Stage III ovarian cancer. At that time, my prognosis was, at best, 5 years. I am still alive today because of incredible advances in gynecological oncology. However, staying alive has required regular surgeries and aggressive treatments causing physical pain, emotional pain, financial strain, and a lifetime of medical uncertainty. While I had a few early remissions in the first two years, there are no more remissions for me. My late-stage ovarian cancer is deadly, chronic, and constantly wavers between progression and relative stability.

My situation is not unique. Like the thousands of women who are diagnosed with and die from late-stage ovarian cancer each year, my situation could have been detected sooner. Specifically, my well-meaning doctors missed numerous signs and symptoms (“shouts,” not “whispers”) in conjunction with my very significant family history of hereditary cancer. While I bounced from specialist to specialist over eleven months, with numerous misses and misdiagnoses, my disease silently progressed to Stage IIIC.

If only I could turn back the clock. If I or any one of my healthcare providers had more awareness for Ovarian Cancer risk factors and symptoms or worked with a company like Aspira Women's Health, my last eight years of physical pain, emotional pain (for myself and my family), financial strain and a lifetime weighed down by constant medical uncertainty may have been completely avoided. Here are 10 things I want you, the doctors, the younger generations, and other women, to know:

To My Doctors:

1. Please think comprehensively about women's health. Account for family history symptoms and exams and don't be reluctant to order diagnostic tests.
2. Please coordinate care with my other doctors. If you refer me to a specialist, stay involved with the referral and follow up on conclusions and outcomes.
3. If I tell you that something doesn't feel right, listen and don't be dismissive of what you assume are “vague” complaints.
4. If you cannot figure out what is wrong with me, please don't be so quick to refer me out to another specialist to wash your hands of the situation.

To My Younger Self:

5. Talk to your family members and really know your medical history. This information could save your life.

6. When you go to any doctor, please discuss your medical history and ask if there is more that you can be doing to protect yourself from future diseases.
7. Ask any of your doctors about the benefits of genetic testing, if your doctor doesn't offer genetic testing, get a referral to speak with a genetic counselor.

To Other Women:

8. If you don't feel right with any of the below symptoms for two weeks, go to your doctor and demand that they listen. If they do not, find another doctor. Keep fighting for your care, it could save your life.
9. Know the early symptoms of ovarian cancer:
 - B – Bloating
 - E – Eat and feel full
 - A – Abdominal pain and/or discomfort
 - T – Trouble with your bladder
 - I – Irritable Bowels (diarrhea and/or constipation)
 - T – Trouble with back pain

To My Insurance Company:

10. Please think twice about the long-term benefits of paying for necessary testing for the early detection of ovarian cancer versus the short-term cost saving of denial of these life-saving tests.

Diane's story is not a unique one. If you have symptoms talk to your doctor about a transvaginal ultrasound. If you have a pelvic mass ask your doctor about [OVA1plus](#); to understand your hereditary genetic risk talk to your doctor about [Aspira GenetiX](#) provided by Aspira Women's Health. OVA1plus is not a screening test for ovarian cancer.