

WEB EXCLUSIVES

CA-125 Monitoring Not Helpful for Ovarian Cancer Survivors

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Results from an international study challenge current practice of screening for ovarian cancer relapse. Currently, survivors undergo quarterly monitoring of CA-125, a protein that is predictive of ovarian cancer relapse. With early detection of recurrence, patients often begin treatment before symptoms manifest. However, a study showing that early treatment does not improve overall survival may change that tradition.

The study looked at 529 ovarian cancer survivors who were in remission but whose CA-125 levels began to rise. Researchers found that the group who received treatment at the time their levels increased did not live longer than the group who received treatment after the onset of symptoms (these patients did not have their levels made available to the physician or patient). Patients with early treatment received therapy about four to five months sooner than the delayed treatment group, but this did not result in improved survival. In addition, the quality of life was lower in the group who received quarterly CA-125 testing, presumably because of anxiety about the results and because this group was exposed to more types of chemotherapy and longer treatment.

“For the first time, women can be offered informed choices after first-line chemotherapy,” said presenter Gordon Rustin, MD, of Mount Vernon Cancer Centre, during the presentation. Because early treatment does not result in a survival advantage or a longer remission, Rustin told doctors there is no benefit from early recurrence detection with routine CA-125 testing.