

A photograph of two hands, palms up, holding a teal awareness ribbon. The background is dark and textured.

THE OVARIAN CANCER

JOURNEY

By Kelly Moricca

Busy days of pushing ourselves—at home, with the kids, at work, during our workouts - naturally makes us feel tired and worn out. Most days feeling 100% is so unlikely. Would we even know what 100% felt like?

That is what Dr. Carol Clinton, founder and medical director of Timeless Skin Solutions, thought when she went through months of feeling tired all the time, being irritable and suffering from back pain. At the time, Dr. Clinton was raising a family, taking care of her home, working on her career and training for a half marathon. It's no wonder she was feeling the way she was. And that is what she attributed the symptoms to.

During an annual exam, Dr. Clinton discussed her symptoms with her doctor and even experienced discomfort in

the exam. Her doctor decided to investigate with further testing. Bloodwork showed elevated levels of CA125 and an ultrasound on her ovaries showed solid grey on her right ovary.

She was diagnosed with ovarian cancer, met with a gynecological oncologist and was scheduled for surgery. "One of the most important things you can do is find the right doctor, specializing in the type of cancer you have been diagnosed with," explains Dr. Clinton.

Following her recovery from surgery and during her follow-up treatment, Dr. Clinton carefully meandered through the process of being cared for. Her three, small children (6, 9 and 12 at the time, in 2005) coped with it in very different ways – one was all about the facts, one was very affectionate and one resorted to humor. “To this day, that is very much the way they continue to cope with it.” Her husband became the primary caregiver and exceeded her expectations. She was reluctant to be cared for by others but found that everyone was so nice and she truly appreciated all the food and visits she and her family received.

The change in her body during treatment was also something that Dr. Clinton wasn’t sure how to respond to. She started wearing a wig and then quickly realized that she hated the feeling of it and didn’t see what was so bad about being herself, showing her true self during this time. Friends, family and strangers were so open to having conversations with her once she removed the wig, “People found it easier to have open conversations with me about ovarian cancer. It was a gift I wouldn’t have had if I closed myself off with a wig and scarves.”

Because Dr. Clinton is a medical professional, she can intellectualize the process of her continued care and is confident that there will always be a plan. Priorities have changed. “Now I ask myself, am I doing what I want to be doing with my life and time.”

As with most cancers, early detection can often be life-saving. Cancer cells can grow in any part of the body and can rapidly spread to other areas. Cells grow out of control, crowd out normal cells and can travel to other parts of the body. This makes it very difficult for the body to function normally. Ovarian cancer is no exception.

Ovarian cancer affects the ovarian tissue in the female reproductive system. It is the 5th most common cause of cancer death in women largely because it often goes undetected until it has reached an advanced stage.

Some early symptoms of ovarian cancer are:

- Swelling or pain in the abdomen
- Abnormal bleeding
- A feeling of fullness or discomfort in the pelvic area
- Pain during sexual intercourse
- Indigestion, gas or bloating that is not treatable with over-the-counter medications



Dr. Carol Clinton with her daughter, Maeve

During an annual gynecology exam, a pap smear can usually detect abnormal cells which will lead to further testing. It cannot be stressed enough how important it is schedule an annual exam. There is a 90% cure rate for early detection of ovarian cancer.

The most common form of ovarian cancer is epithelial ovarian cancer. This accounts for 90+% of ovarian cancer cases. This cancer occurs in the layers of cells lining the ovaries and fallopian tubes. Most epithelial ovarian tumors are benign, grow slowly, are less likely to travel. Diagnosis of epithelial ovarian cancer is most common during a physical, pelvic exam. If symptoms present themselves, the patient will continue on to various imaging tests, blood work and finally, a biopsy to determine if the cancer is present and determine the ultimate diagnosis of the cancer.

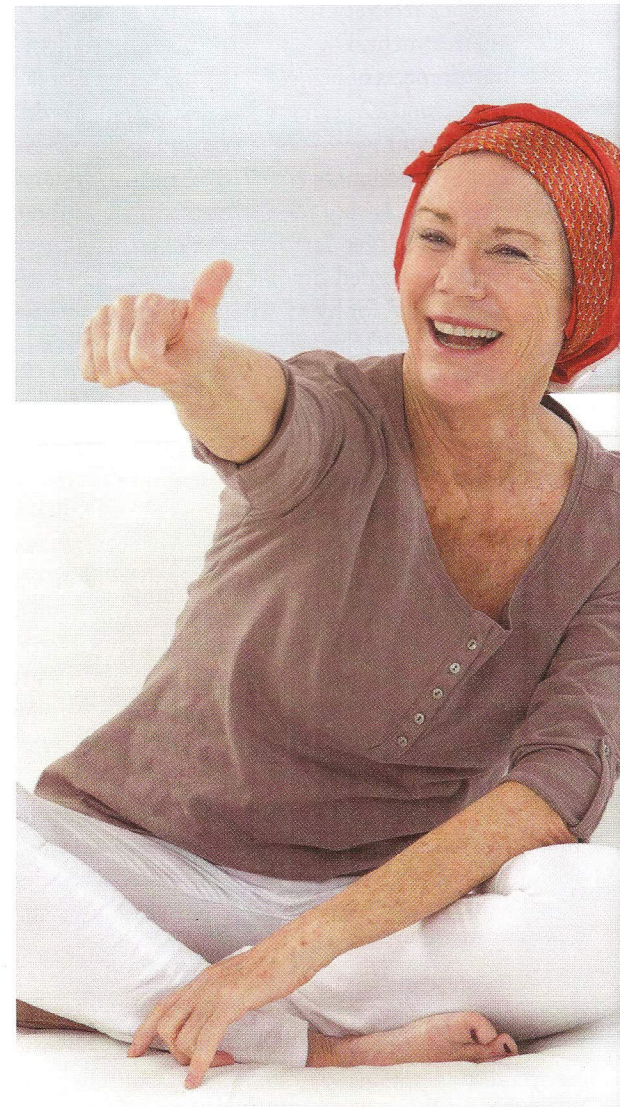
Another form of ovarian cancer is ovarian germ cell tumors. Germ cells are the cells that form the eggs in the female ovaries. There are several forms of germ cell tumors and some are more serious than others, but have a very low rate of occurrence. Less than 2% of ovarian cancer are germ cell tumors. This type of cancer can occur at any age but is most common among those of reproductive age, 10-30 years old. Surgery to remove the ovary is a highly recommended treatment followed by chemotherapy and/or radiation.

Ovarian stromal tumors occur in about 1% of ovarian cancer cases. This form of ovarian cancer is often diagnosed in women over the age of 50.

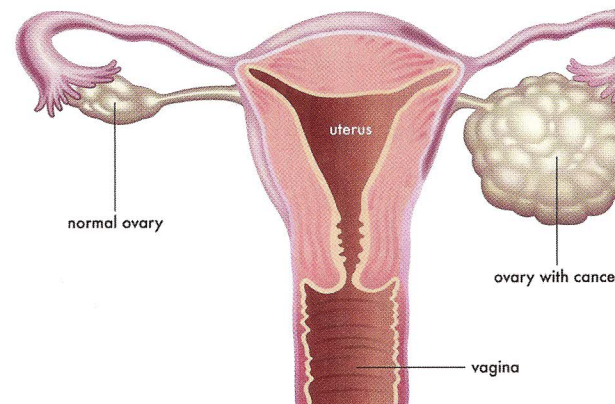
The most common symptom is vaginal bleeding because these tumors produce the female hormone, estrogen. Many cases are detected early due to unusual vaginal bleeding concerns that cause the patient to see their doctor. Again, surgery to remove the tumor, followed by chemotherapy and/or radiation are often the treatment method recommended.

Because ovarian cancer affects the female reproductive organ, many factors play a part in the best treatment plan. Things to consider are the general health of the patient, whether they plan to have children and the age of the woman and how she might tolerate recommended treatments due to risks and side effects.

Often alternative forms of treatment are considered or used in conjunction with traditional treatment methods. Alternative treatments are often complimentary to traditional treatments and can help alleviate side effects which make patients more comfortable during their treatment.



Ovarian Cancer





“It is challenging for patients to carry on with the things they enjoy the most,” says Larry Copeland, MD, Gynecological Oncologist, James Cancer Hospital at The Ohio State University. “Patients get distracted by their disease and stop living.” Often times alternative treatments can help increase energy, relieve symptoms caused by the side effects of treatment and leave patients feeling healthier, more active while treating their cancer. “You keep living your life and let me worry about keeping you alive,” Dr. Copeland adds regarding his patient care philosophy.

The statistics are astounding. One-third of American women will get some form of cancer in their lifetime. Cancer does not have to be isolating. “We play a vital role in the lives of individuals with cancer, their families, friends, co-workers and caregivers as they navigate their cancer experience by providing them with education and support,” says Angie Santangelo, MSW, LISW-S, Clinical Program Director,

Cancer Support Community Central Ohio. The Cancer Support Community of Central Ohio offers newcomers an invitation to meet the staff and participate in a brief screening that helps determine the wellness plan and direct people to programs to help in specific areas of concern. There is no fee to participate in any program at Cancer Support Community of Central Ohio. “All programs and services

are provided at no cost to ensure that we do not increase the financial burden that often accompanies the cost of cancer care,” adds Angie. Programs at Cancer Support Community of Central Ohio include support groups, healthy lifestyle programs, educational programs and social connections.

Many great advances are being made in the detection, treatment and prevention of ovarian cancer. Patients are able to get back to their lives and leave this, often silent form of cancer, behind them.

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