

Patients with Ovarian Cancer: Improving Health Outcomes

Ovarian cancer is the deadliest gynecologic cancer. Evidence-based standard care of patients with ovarian cancer is defined as surgery, chemotherapy, and testing for germline mutations. **Research has shown that women are more likely to receive standard care when they are treated by a gynecologic oncologist.**¹

The CDC funded a project to study the barriers that women may face in receiving guideline-recommended treatment for ovarian cancer. The Iowa Cancer Registry, the Iowa Department of Public Health, and the Iowa Cancer Consortium have been working to identify these barriers and develop and implement strategies to address them. Ultimately the project aims to increase access and referrals to gynecologic oncologists.

Medical providers in Iowa reported they perceived the following as issues preventing patients from seeking care from a gynecologic oncologist:

1. Long wait times
2. Reluctance to seek care at large medical centers due to distance, cost, and because the experience is functionally challenging and overwhelming

However, women reported in interviews they were not referred to a gynecologic oncologist by their diagnosing provider. In addition, patients who did not

receive care by a gynecologic oncologist indicated they did not consider the above to be barriers in seeking specialized care for their ovarian cancer. They expressed their trust and confidence in their diagnosing providers and did not think they needed a second opinion or to see another doctor for treatment. Finally, several indicated that they would readily do whatever their provider recommended:

“For better or worse, I did pretty much what I was told to do.”

“They’re good doctors. We don’t question what they say is okay. There are good doctors over there.”

Women diagnosed with ovarian cancer should be referred to a gynecologic oncologist for treatment planning and surgical care. They can be referred to the following centers:

1. University of Iowa Hospital and Clinics*
Call 319-356-4200.
2. The Iowa Clinic of Des Moines
Call 515-875-9290.
3. University of Nebraska Medical Center*
Call 402-559-5068.
4. Mayo Clinic of Rochester, MN*
Use the referring physician portal (registration required), found at <http://www.mayoclinic.org/medical-professionals/provider-relations/refer-patient> or call 800-533-1564.
5. Sanford Health, Sioux Falls, SD
Use the online referral form found at <https://www.sanfordhealth.org/referral-center> or call 844-851-1515.
6. Avera Medical Group, Sioux Falls, SD
Call 605-322-7535.

*NCI-designated Cancer Center



How Can I Help My Patients Diagnosed with Ovarian Cancer?

Take the time to address any questions and concerns.

Women have reported feeling unprepared, anxious, and confused after receiving an ovarian cancer diagnosis. Patients often depend on providers' recommendations during this difficult period. People with cancer need support and information, and above all hope, no matter what stage of illness they may be in.

Send patients home with additional materials to read through.

Women newly diagnosed with ovarian cancer may be overwhelmed by all of the information available and can experience additional barriers such as a lack of access to the internet or discomfort in using a computer. Both the [National Ovarian Cancer Coalition](#) and the [Foundation for Women's Cancer](#) have ovarian cancer guides for newly diagnosed women. We have also developed a resource for patients in Iowa, available here: <https://bit.ly/2Yn0o05>.

Refer patients to a gynecologic oncologist for treatment planning and surgical care, and then follow up to ensure an appointment has been made.

The Society for Gynecologic Oncologists and American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommend that treatment for ovarian cancer be provided by a gynecologic oncologist.² Talk to patients about the advantages of seeing a gynecologic oncologist, including:

- 1) Superior survival rates
- 2) Up-to-date training and treatment options
- 3) Their access to pathology and tumor boards

All of these result from the additional research and clinical training completed by gynecologic oncologists during fellowship years.

^{1,2} National Academies of Sciences Engineering and Medicine. *Ovarian cancers: evolving paradigms in research and care*. The National Academies Press; Washington, DC. 2016.