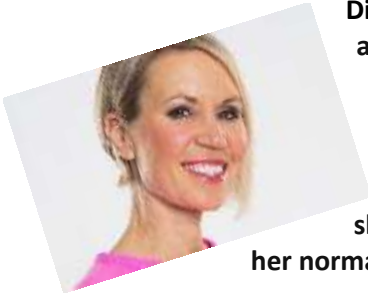


Ovarian Cancer – “The Silent Killer”



Diane Oxberry, an exceptionally talented TV presenter, died earlier this year after a very short battle with ovarian cancer. She had fronted the weather on BBC North West Tonight for over 20 years and was an inspiration to most of those who watched her - with her charm, wit, warmth and bubbly personality – such that many viewers looked forward to welcoming her into their homes each night as if she were part of their family. People were shocked, not only at her passing, but also with its suddenness, having seen her normal buoyant personality live on the box only weeks previously.

There can a number of reasons for such an outcome but the stage of the disease at presentation is probably the commonest. Some tumours do not readily make their presence known at an early stage, particularly those, like ovarian cancer, where the organ involved lies deep within the body. In the early months of pregnancy there can be few local signs indicating that a foetus is slowly developing – occasionally a woman does not even realise she is pregnant until the baby appears. The symptoms that are produced by an ovarian tumour - lying adjacent to the womb, surrounded by the gut and behind the bladder - are often vague leading to late presentation and it being labelled ‘the silent killer’.

The four main symptoms of ovarian cancer are:

- Persistent stomach pain
- Persistent bloating or increased stomach size
- Difficulty eating or feeling full quickly
- Needing to wee more frequently and urgently

The problem is that these symptoms are more commonly associated with a number of less worrying conditions - Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), simple constipation, polycystic ovaries or recurrent cystitis.

However, there are a number of key factors that increase their likelihood of being associated with early ovarian cancer:

- Their persistence – they don’t go away
- Their frequency - they occur on most days
- Their severity – slowly getting worse
- They are unusual – they are out of the ordinary for you

Keep a record of the symptoms you are experiencing - their pattern, frequency and severity. Download a symptom diary (www.ovarian.org.uk) or search ‘Ovarian Cancer Action’ in your phone’s app store for a digital version. The Macmillan Cancer Information Centre at the Hospital can also assist you with a paper copy. If you are concerned, make an appointment to see your GP and take the diary with you as this will assist your GP in deciding if you require onwards referral.



Survival from ovarian cancer, with better treatments developed in recent decades, has transformed outcomes for many of those who may have been untreatable in the past, but early presentation is still a major determinant of a wished-for cure.



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