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Los Alamos Mom's - Help Turn a "Silent Killer" into a Known Threat

- Do you think that ovarian cancer only strikes post menopausal, childless women?
- Do you think that there is no link between breast cancer and ovarian cancer?
- Do you think that ovarian cancer is only caused by hormonal factors and not environmental ones?



If so, then Kay Kerbyson (pictured above) is a woman on a mission, to educate you about the risks and symptoms of ovarian cancer. In November 2006, Kay was diagnosed with late stage ovarian cancer. She says, "I'd felt bloated and gassy for a while but never in a million years thought I had cancer". It wasn't until a suspected bladder infection led to an ultrasound that the cancer was detected. By that stage, it had already spread through her pelvic area and up to her diaphragm. After an 8 hour operation, 6 months of chemotherapy and a clinical drug trial, Kay is now in remission. However, ovarian cancer is one of those awful cancers which like to hide away and then reoccur later. As Deborah Armstrong M.D, of Johns Hopkins University says on her website, "We're good at getting people into initial remission. We're just not so good at keeping them there."

Ovarian cancer is one of the hardest to detect and deadliest of all female cancers.

- **If caught early**, before the cancer has spread outside of the ovaries, **the 5 year survival rate is 93%**, but only 19% of cases are detected this early.
- **The mean 5 year survival rate is 45%**. However, this figure includes those women who have had a recurrence, and does not take account of cancer progression. For advanced stage cancers, the rates are lower.
- **1 in 69 women** will be diagnosed with ovarian cancer.

That's why every women needs to know the warning signs, so that action can be taken early. What are the symptoms? New advice was formally announced on June 25th by the Gynecologic Cancer Foundation, the Society of Gynecologic Oncologists and the American Cancer Society.

The symptoms to watch out for are:

- **bloating, pelvic or abdominal pain,**
- **difficulty eating, feeling full quickly,**
- **a frequent, or urgent, need to urinate.**

A woman who has any of those problems, nearly every day for more than two or three weeks, is advised to see a gynecologist, especially if the symptoms are new and quite different from her usual state of health. Kay had at least 3 of these symptoms in the 6 months prior to her diagnosis but, having been given a clean gynecological bill of health in March of 2006, dismissed them as not worth investigating. "I had the CA-125 test (a protein found in the blood which some tumors can produce) in March of '06 and the level was normal. Eight months later it was through the roof and the cancer had worked its way up to my right diaphragm which had to be removed".

Treatment of ovarian cancer usually involves hysterectomy, removal of the tumors and chemotherapy. With that, 60-80% of women will reach full remission, just like Kay. The problem is that 80% of those women will get a recurrence of the disease, which is then harder to treat. "Surgery and chemotherapy for ovarian cancer is a very hard on the body. As the saying goes, they have to kill you to cure you". That's why Kay wants to spare as many women, and their families, as she can from having to go through the same trauma her family has, by getting ovarian cancer detected earlier.

Around 30% of cases are diagnosed in women under 54, around 15% in those under 44, so younger women shouldn't assume that only postmenopausal women get this disease. That's what Kay wants every Mom in Los Alamos to be aware of. "Know the risk factors, be aware of the warning symptoms and ask for the CA-125 test if you are at all concerned". Some of the major risk factors are: having a family history of breast cancer due to a hereditary gene; having low estrogen, having used fertility drugs, using or having used talcum powder.

Ovarian cancer is not called the "**Silent Killer**" for nothing. "My goal is to change it into a "**Known Threat**. We owe it to our families, friends and colleagues to at least make them aware of the facts. If I can save the life, or improve the prognosis, of one woman in Los Alamos, then I can have more peace in my life. I'm 40, have 2 beautiful 3 year old twin girls and I intend to stick around and watch them grow up. With the wonderful team of my surgeon, Dr Carolyn Muller at UNMH, and the doctors and staff of the Cancer Institute of New Mexico, I'm positive that I'm going to do that. I just want other women to have the knowledge that I didn't have a year ago".

Kay has produced a one page leaflet on Ovarian Cancer which is being distributed to parents of most of the pre-schools in Los Alamos. You can also find them at the CB Fox Kids, Otowi Book Station, Mesa Public Library (children's section), Family Strengths Network and the Family Council, as well as on many of the notice boards around town. Or you can email Kay directly at ks_kerbyson@hotmail.com for an electronic copy. The leaflet gives more information about risk factors, symptoms etc and a number of web site addresses where further information can be obtained.