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Ovarian cancer community welcomes Australian-led study laying groundwork for early screening test

Community donations enable an ovarian cancer screening test study, turning grassroots generosity into genuine research progress.

Australia's leading independent ovarian cancer research funder, the Ovarian Cancer Research Foundation (OCRF), proudly welcomes the commencement of a new study to support the development of a population-based ovarian cancer screening test.

Announced yesterday, the commencement of the EARLY study at The University of Queensland (UQ), led by Professor Carlos Salomon Gallo, Director of the UQ Centre for Extracellular Vesicle Nanomedicine, is a milestone step for the OCRF-7 early detection program.

The EARLY study will recruit approximately 1,500 postmenopausal women aged 50 to 74 from across Queensland. Participants will provide a small blood sample and basic health information, allowing researchers to evaluate the stability of EV biomarkers under real-world collection, transport, and storage conditions.

Urgent need

Ovarian cancer is the most lethal gynaecological cancer, claiming more than 1,000 lives each year. Fewer than 50 per cent of women survive beyond five years after diagnosis, largely because the disease is diagnosed late and there are currently no reliable screening tests. Early detection dramatically improves survival, which is why innovative approaches are so urgently needed.

The EARLY study builds on more than eight years of continuous OCRF investment, competitively awarded through OCRF's National Research Grants Program, including early seed funding that enabled the research to progress from concept to clinical study.

Since 2017, OCRF has contributed more than $1.7 million to the program and is an Industry Partner in a $1.46 million grant from the Australian Government's National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), which is now funding this study collectively. The Lions Medical Research Foundation, in collaboration with Mater Research and Queensland Centre for Gynaecological Cancer Research, have also supported the research.

Promising research fuelled by the community

Ovarian Cancer Research Foundation Chief Executive Officer, Robin Penty, congratulated Professor Salomon Gallo on this milestone for the research and highlighted the importance of early detection and community support:

OVARIAN CANCER RESEARCH FOUNDATION

"Early detection is key to saving lives. OCRF funding provided the launchpad that allowed this work to establish the proof points needed to attract government backing. This exceptional work by Professor Salomon Gallo and his team takes us a step closer to a future where ovarian cancer can be caught earlier, giving women hope and better outcomes," she said. "Every penny the OCRF invests in research is contributed by the Australian community, so in many ways this is their achievement too, and highlights the power of community action."

Professor Salomon's research program is at the core of the biomarker panel named OCRF-7, in recognition of the Ovarian Cancer Research Foundation's support. This approach focuses on extracellular vesicles, tiny nanoparticles released by cells into the bloodstream that carry biological signals, or biomarkers, associated with disease. Importantly, tumour cells release these vesicles at the earliest stages of cancer development, providing a potential pathway for earlier detection, even before symptoms appear.

UQ's commercialisation company UniQuest has exclusively licensed the technology to ASX-listed biotechnology company INOVIQ Ltd (ASX: IIQ) to develop and commercialise this EV-based ovarian cancer screening test.

It has been evaluated on more than 500 blood samples and demonstrated 100 per cent detection of early-stage (I and II) ovarian cancer. It possesses an extremely low false positive rate of 0.4 per cent in recent studies, which makes it a potential candidate as a screening tool.

From bench to bedside

Professor Salomon Gallo said the study demonstrates how innovative research has the potential to dramatically improve ovarian cancer survival rates:

"OCRF funding has been pivotal in advancing OCRF-7 from concept to clinical study, and the NHMRC Partnership now enables us to generate critical data on how this approach performs under real-world conditions, including participant recruitment in both rural and metropolitan areas."

Early detection remains one of OCRF's core strategic priorities, with the foundation continuing to invest in multiple early-detection research projects across Australia.

"This study shows what is possible when community generosity, scientific expertise and government partnership come together with a shared purpose," concludes Robin Penty, "This is how we will save lives and create a vital, healthy future for women and girls affected by ovarian cancer."

-ENDS-

Media enquiries

Shannon Muscolino
e. shannon@ardentcom.com.au m. 0439 025 701

For media enquiries regarding the study, please contact UQ Communications: communications@uq.edu.au 07 3365 1130. Information about recruitment and eligibility is available on the EARLY study website.

About Ovarian Cancer Research Foundation

The Ovarian Cancer Research Foundation (OCRF) is Australia's leading independent funder of ovarian cancer research, dedicated to transforming outcomes for the most lethal women's cancer. In Australia, fewer than 50 per cent of women and girls diagnosed with ovarian cancer will survive more than five years - a figure unchanged for decades, highlighting disparities and gender inequities in research and care that demand urgent action.

OCRF is rewriting this story. Our vision is a future where those impacted by ovarian cancer can live healthy, vital lives. To achieve this, we are catalysing change and accelerating progress by increasing awareness, advocating for greater investment and equity, collaborating nationally and internationally, and strategically funding high-impact medical research.

Every dollar we raise comes from the Australian community, driven by a shared determination to make our vision a reality.

Together, we will overcome ovarian cancer.

References

1. INOVIQ ASX: https://announcements.asx.com.au/asxpdf/20250926/pdf/06pq9715dhjrvq.pdf,\
2. ASCO Abstract: https://ascopubs.org/doi/abs/10.1200/JCO.2025.43.16_suppl.5582
3. Salomon et al. Early detection of ovarian cancer: An accurate high-throughput extracellular vesicle test. Journal of Clinical Oncology, 2025 https://ascopubs.org/doi/10.1200/JCO.2025.43.16_suppl.5582

Notes:

The University of Queensland has partnered with ASX-listed biotechnology company INOVIQ Ltd (ASX: IIQ), which holds the exclusive worldwide licence to exosomal biomarker intellectual property developed at UQ and managed by UniQuest, the university's commercialisation company.

About ovarian cancer

Ovarian cancer begins when abnormal cells grow in and around the ovaries or fallopian tubes.

Although ovarian cancer most commonly occurs in older women, about 40 per cent of cases are diagnosed in women under 60, and, over the past two decades, cases in women under 45 have risen by 61 per cent.

In Australia, ovarian cancer is now considered a common cancer for women, with around 2,000 new cases diagnosed each year. It claims the lives of around 1,000 Australian women annually. The five-year survival rate of 49% sits well below that of many other cancers.

One of the biggest challenges is that symptoms are often vague and easily mistaken for less serious conditions. This means too many people are diagnosed late, when treatment is more difficult, and recurrence is common.

Early diagnosis can make all the difference; however, there is no early detection test yet, so it's vital to know what to look for.

Ovarian cancer has four main symptoms:

- Bloating
- Feeling full more quickly
- Needing to pee more frequently
- Abdominal pain

Other symptoms can include indigestion, back pain, extreme tiredness for no obvious reason, a change in bowel habits (going more often than usual or less frequently), postmenopausal vaginal bleeding, and unexplained weight loss.

If symptoms are persistent, severe, frequent or out of the ordinary, then you should make an appointment with your GP.