



PRESS RELEASE
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**Uterine Cancer:
Improved awareness, increased survival**

The Women's Health Council, a state agency to promote health and social gain for women in Ireland, today published a fact sheet on uterine cancer, the fourth paper in a series of reviews on the effectiveness of cancer treatments.

Uterine (or womb) cancer is the 6th most common cancer among women in Ireland. Women with uterine cancer only have a 32% chance of surviving beyond the first five years if the disease is diagnosed at an advanced stage. However, the five-year survival rate is 82% if the cancer is detected at an early stage. Raising awareness of the symptoms of uterine cancer will give women a better chance of being diagnosed at an earlier stage.

Geraldine Luddy, Director of the Women's Health Council, stated that: "Women must be aware of symptoms that might indicate uterine cancer. The most common symptom of uterine cancer is **abnormal bleeding** from the vagina, especially in postmenopausal women. Women should also seek medical advice if they experience any of the less common symptoms". These include:

- ◆ Pain in the abdomen, back or legs.
- ◆ Pain or bleeding during intercourse or when urinating.
- ◆ A change in bowel habits (such as constipation).
- ◆ Weight loss.
- ◆ Womb feeling enlarged or swollen.

Women should be reassured that it is most likely that these symptoms are not uterine cancer, but they may be present in some women with the disease, so it is important that women should have them checked out by their doctor.

Women should also be aware of the risk factors for uterine cancer. The most important risk factor for uterine cancer is increasing age - almost 90% of uterine cancer cases present in women aged over 50. Women are also at increased risk if they have a family history of uterine cancer, have a late menopause (after age 52), started menstruating early or are infertile. Evidence suggests that women who are obese and/or who have a high fat diet also have an increased risk of uterine cancer. Oral contraceptive pill use, having children and exercising all have protective effects against uterine cancer.

The treatment for uterine cancer will depend on the woman's age, the extent of the cancer, and her general health.



- ◆ Surgery is normally the first treatment used for uterine cancer, and may be the only treatment required if the cancer is completely contained within the uterus.
- ◆ Most women with uterine cancer are advised to have a total hysterectomy, with the uterus and both ovaries removed. Nine out of ten women with stage 1 uterine cancer treated with surgery alone will **not** have a recurrence of their cancer.

For recurrent or more advanced stage cancers additional treatments may be required, including radiotherapy, chemotherapy and hormone therapy:

- ◆ Radiotherapy after surgery may reduce the risk of cancer recurring by up to 72% compared to surgery alone, although it is associated with risk of damage and toxicity.
- ◆ There is currently no standard chemotherapy regimen for treating uterine cancer, but platinum drugs, anthracyclines and paclitaxel currently appear to be the most effective.
- ◆ Hormone therapy may be a useful treatment for women diagnosed with early stage, low-grade uterine cancer who wish to preserve their fertility (around 10% of women diagnosed with uterine cancer are premenopausal). Approximately one in four (25%) tumours respond well to treatment with hormone therapy drugs.

Treatment with chemotherapy combined with radiotherapy (chemoradiation) is currently being investigated in clinical trials. Research is also investigating the use of targeted therapies for treating uterine cancer; these therapies use drugs to block the growth of cancer by interfering with specific molecules involved in their development and growth.

Geraldine Luddy, Director of the Women's Health Council stated that: "Advances in cancer treatment are constantly being made. This review summarises the most recent evidence on the effectiveness of treatments that offer improved survival and cure rates, and a better quality of life for women. However, it is important that people know that some treatments are only effective depending on the type of cancer and the woman's individual profile"

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The Women's Health Council is a statutory body established in 1997 to advise the Minister for Health and Children on all aspects of women's health. The mission of the Women's Health Council is to inform and influence the development of health policy to ensure the maximum health and social gain for women in Ireland. Its membership is representative of a wide range of expertise and interest in women's health.



Notes to Editor:

- ◆ The fact sheet “*Uterine Cancer Treatments: A Review of the Bio-Medical Evidence*” is available from the Women’s Health Council website at: http://www.whc.ie/documents/28_WHC_Uterine.pdf
- ◆ Separate fact sheets on breast, ovarian and cervical cancer are also available from the Women’s Health Council’s website (<http://www.whc.ie/publications/28>) and in hard copy.
- ◆ The publication “*Cancer Treatments: A review of the bio-medical evidence on breast, ovarian and cervical cancer*” is available from the Women’s Health Council website: http://www.whc.ie/documents/40_cancerTreatment.pdf. A summary of this review is also available on the Women’s Health Council website (http://www.whc.ie/documents/40_cancerTreatmentSummary.pdf) and in hard copy.
- ◆ A further report on cancer, “*Women and cancer in Ireland 1994-2001*” published in 2006 by the National Cancer Registry of Ireland and the Women’s Health Council is available at http://www.whc.ie/documents/40_women_cancer.pdf
- ◆ The Women’s Health Council supports the establishment of eight Specialist Cancer Centres across Ireland. Evidence shows the quality of care and survival rates are higher for cancer patients treated in such centres.