

Living with ovarian cancer

By Shari Held ■ For Custom Publications

This year in the United States, approximately 14,300 of our mothers, daughters and sisters will succumb to ovarian cancer. More than 25,000 will find out they have the disease.

It has been called “disproportionately deadly” because it’s found early in only 25 percent of those diagnosed. Symptoms are subtle and there is currently no reliable screening test available.

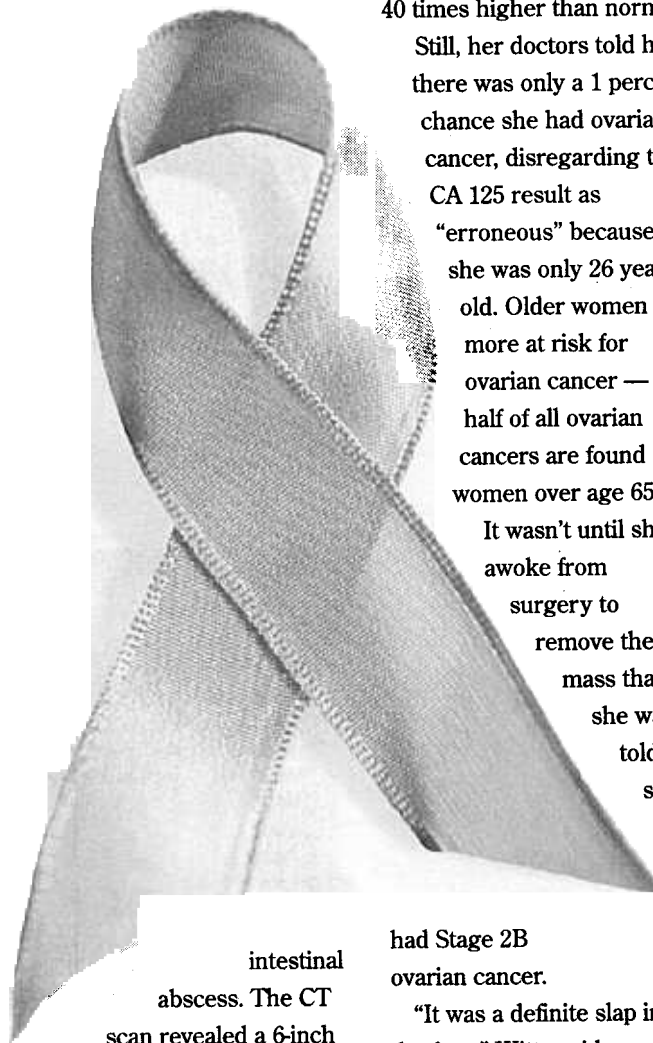
In Indiana, approximately 400 women will lose their battle with the disease this year.

Here are the stories of two local women with ovarian cancer — how they were diagnosed, how it affects their lives and their advice for other women.

Mary’s story

“I thought I just had food poisoning,” Mary Witty said of the vomiting and nausea that was so extreme it caused her mother to “drag” her to the doctor.

She was given a CA 125, transvaginal ultrasound and CT scan in the hospital and diagnosed with an



intestinal abscess. The CT scan revealed a 6-inch mass and her CA 125 was

40 times higher than normal. Still, her doctors told her there was only a 1 percent chance she had ovarian cancer, disregarding the CA 125 result as “erroneous” because she was only 26 years old. Older women are more at risk for ovarian cancer — half of all ovarian cancers are found in women over age 65.

It wasn’t until she awoke from surgery to remove the mass that she was told she

had Stage 2B ovarian cancer.

“It was a definite slap in the face,” Witty said.

Her dreams for the future

— having children and attending medical school — were shattered.

“Looking back now, I had so many of the symptoms that you could just check them on down the list. But I didn’t know about it,” she said. “The symptoms are so vague it’s easy to discount them.”

CA 125 is a protein found in the blood of many women with ovarian cancer. Levels of CA 125 are used to check whether the cancer is responding to treatment, is continuing to grow or is coming back after surgery and chemotherapy.

It hasn’t been easy, but Witty has come to terms with ovarian cancer via support from family, friends and others who have faced her same fears at the Wellness Community.



Half of ovarian cancers are found in women over age 65, but younger women should know the signs.

FILE PHOTO

Advice from women who've been there

- Have an annual gynecological exam, including a rectal exam.
- Know your body. Listen to what it's telling you so you can feel when something isn't right.
- Know the symptoms of ovarian cancer. If you develop symptoms that persist, see your doctor right away.
- If you suspect ovarian cancer, ask your doctor for the CA 125 blood test and a transvaginal ultrasound. If your doctor won't order the tests, find one who will.
- If you're diagnosed with suspected ovarian cancer, have a gynecological oncologist on your team. This can improve your chances for survival.
- Get active with Ovar'coming Together, the Wellness Community and the American Cancer Society. Information is your best line of defense.

She's putting her life back together. Recently she built her own home and took a job that requires frequent travel.

"Chronic is OK. If you have a disease under control and it's not growing, if it's not killing your quality of life, then that's OK," she said. "It is not a death sentence. We can survive, even though it's a struggle every day."

Sally's story

It started with some abdominal pain in the fall of 1997.

"I didn't pay too much attention to it because I had had a CA 125 in the spring and it was fine. I figured, how much could happen in six month's time? That was the wrong thing to think," said Sally McFarland, who was diagnosed with Stage 3 ovarian cancer during surgery the following February.

She had been diagnosed with breast cancer in 1987, which put her at higher risk for developing ovarian cancer.

McFarland, age 62, found the process of going

through chemotherapy on the coattails of a

DO YOU HAVE A
BOTOX BUDDY?

Sure you do: a sister, a friend or even a husband who could use a little lift. Visit **InterFace** together this month and you'll each get **\$100** off your Botox treatments...and **lunch is on us!** Call **today**... this offer is limited!

201 Pennsylvania Parkway
Indianapolis, IN 46280
and 14 locations statewide.
317.815.0055 Voice
888.299.1412 Toll Free
317.817.1737 Facsimile
www.interfacegroup.com

INTERFace
WE SPECIALIZE IN THE EYE AND LIPS