

WEATHER WATCH:

Milwaukee, WI 32° high 32° | low 24°

Detailed Forecast | 7 Day | Doppler Radar | Alerts | TMJ4 Weather Blog



Sleep Apnea was Ruining My Life!

CLICK NOW to see Linda's Story and take our Online Risk Assessment

Health and Fitness

[Home](#) » [Features](#) » [Health and Fitness](#)

Ovarian cancer tales warn of delayed diagnosis

Patients open up to medical students

By Mark Johnson of the Journal Sentinel

Posted: Sept. 20, 2009 | (0) COMMENTS

Symptoms

Peter Johnson, medical director of gynecologic oncology at Aurora Women's Pavilion in West Allis, said that if women experience the following symptoms daily or almost daily for two to three weeks, it may be a sign that they have ovarian cancer:

- bloating

The tale the three women told scared the young medical students.

The women spoke of a stealth disease that stalked them while doctors missed it. The women knew something was wrong. Yet no one found the disease until it had reached an advanced stage, until some women had so much abdominal swelling that it looked as if they were pregnant.

Some had been reassured that nothing appeared wrong, which made the eventual diagnosis all the more terrible.

"You have cancer, ovarian cancer. You're having surgery at 12 o'clock today," a doctor told Gayle Kremer in 2005. Kremer was 49 and had first approached doctors a full year earlier with symptoms, including abnormal bleeding between

Tools

- print
- e-mail

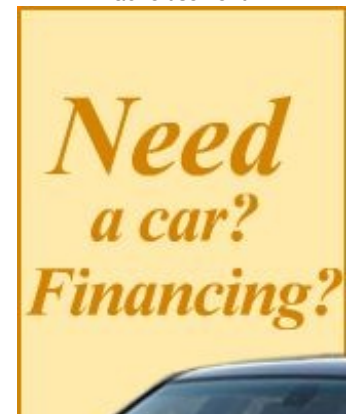
TEXT SIZE AA - +

Yahoo! Buzz	Newsvine
reddit	Digg it
Delicious	Technorati
facebook	Mixx

TOP STORIES

- State's economy suffers as new car sales plummet
- MATC students learn that being a pastry chef is no piece of cake
- Wood admits to drunken driving while fighting to stay in the Assembly
- Bobby led to trial

advertisement



- pelvic or abdominal pain
- difficulty eating or feeling full quickly
- urinary symptoms (urgency or frequency)

When women notice these symptoms, Johnson said, they should:

- Go to the doctor.
- Insist on having a pelvic ultrasound.

If women are diagnosed with ovarian cancer younger than age 50, Johnson said they should be tested to see if they have the gene that causes breast and ovarian cancer. This is important because it may help family members catch the disease earlier and may help doctors keep an aggressive watch for recurrence of the cancer.

periods.

"Do you want me to pray with you?" the doctor asked. So they prayed.

In a conference room recently at Aurora Sinai Medical Center in Milwaukee, a handful of third-year medical students from the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health received a one-hour lesson in ovarian cancer, one they would not soon forget.

They heard tales of puzzling symptoms and missed opportunities. Such stories are common among ovarian cancer patients.

"If these women could be diagnosed at Stage 1, they would have more of a chance to live," said Kelli Zembruski, president of the Wisconsin Ovarian Cancer Alliance. Cancer's progression is ranked in stages, with 1 being the earliest and 4 the latest. Zembruski's sister, Joan Sagan, an oncology nurse herself, was diagnosed with Stage 3 ovarian cancer at the age of 49 and died at 53.

Hard to catch early

National statistics show that 1 in 72 women at some point in life will be diagnosed with ovarian cancer. About 20,000 American women are diagnosed with the disease each year; more than half will die within five years. That translates to 15,000 deaths each year in the United States.

Yet the disease has been long overshadowed by breast cancer.

Far more women are diagnosed with breast cancer each year, but the disease is easier to detect. Women can perform self-exams and catch it early. Ovarian cancer is far more difficult to detect early on.

When Kremer received her diagnosis, doctors operated and told her cancer was in both ovaries and her uterus. She went through six rounds of chemotherapy.

That was 4½ years ago. Today, Kremer told the medical students, an important measure used to detect cancer appears to have returned to normal.

It took doctors more than a year to find out what was causing Sally Heuer's spotting, or light vaginal bleeding. She had completed menopause, so the bleeding was troubling.

Twice over the next year, physicians told her not to worry: "You don't have cancer." But her symptoms persisted.

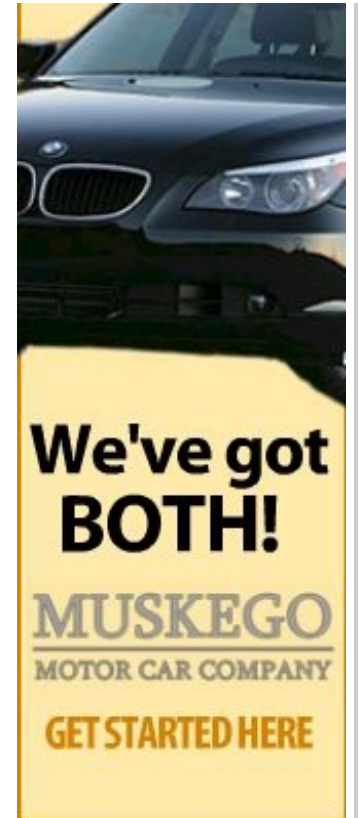
Then, late in 2007, a gynecologist phoned to tell her she had endometrial cancer, which appears in the lining of the

robbery led to triple homicide, police think

- Walker winning in privatization battle

MORE FEATURES

- MATC students learn that being a pastry chef is no piece of cake
- Center's bakers earn master's in science of yeast
- Sweet! You can adopt a Wisconsin maple tree
- Even Samson probably had secrets to keep
- Ryan praised for alternative health-care plan
- GOP health plan takes small steps
- State near bottom in federal health dollars
- In an unexplainable way, friend isn't really dead



Most Popular - Features

most read e-mailed

- MATC students learn that being a pastry chef is no piece of cake
- Sweet! You can adopt a Wisconsin maple tree
- Jalapeno Loco

uterus. Women who have endometrial cancer run a 15% risk of also having ovarian cancer, and when doctors removed her ovaries in a hysterectomy, they found cancer in both.

"I was very angry," she recalled. A year and a half has passed since her diagnosis and treatment.

Message hits home

For Pam Wilhelmsen, the first sign of trouble was acid indigestion. The pain never went away, no matter what medicine she took. Soon she noticed bloating. She could not fit into her clothes. At a walk-in clinic, the doctor could find nothing wrong but gave her the option of further testing.

"It really was me that said, 'Something's wrong. Let's pursue it,' " said Wilhelmsen. Further tests revealed that she had a large mass in her abdomen - ovarian cancer, Stage 3C. She went through six cycles of chemotherapy, but the cancer returned. In August, she started treatment again.

"Basically, we'll probably be in remission and recurrence the rest of my life until we find a cure," Wilhelmsen told the medical students. "I'm ready to fight that battle. I'm excited to talk to you folks. Maybe someday some woman's talking to you and you'll remember one of our stories . . . because it's just real subtle. And maybe one of you will become a researcher and look for screening and a cure."

Students said the message had hit home.

"It's frightening to me as a med student to look and go, 'Oh, my gosh, if I miss something.' You look at what the outcome can be. I think it's good to be always on the edge of that comfort zone," said Kelly Lavin, one of the students.

"It's so nice to put a face and name to a disease we've been hearing about in textbooks," said another, April Zehm. "You hear it now from these women, and it will stick with you forever."

Post a comment

We encourage your comments but will strive to remove discussion that contains personal attacks, racial slurs, profanity or other inappropriate material as outlined in our [guidelines](#). We post-moderate comments on most content, but may choose to pre-moderate some comments so please be patient if you don't see yours appear right way. We also ask for your help by reporting comments you think are inappropriate.

Please [login](#) or [register](#) to post a comment.

Elsewhere on JSOnline

[Cooking 101](#)

[2010 Auto Show](#)

[Readers' Picks](#)

[Winter Olympics](#)

[Wedding Day](#)

[Recipe Database](#)

- Even Samson probably had secrets to keep
- Center's bakers earn master's in science of yeast

[» more most popular content...](#)

Sponsored Links

Yellow Teeth: Fixed for \$1.99*

Don't get ripped off by the dentist, learn one mom's teeth trick

www.ConsumersTeethReport.com

Acai Berry Diet (SHOCKER)

Warning! This Shocking Health Report Reveals The Truth About Acai Berry

ConsumersHealthReports.com

Penny Stock Soaring 3000%

Sign up for Free to find out what the next 3000% Stock Winner Is!

www.PennyStocksUniverse.com



Test your kitchen knowledge



Greater Milwaukee Auto Show preview



Best Japanese restaurants



Coverage of the Vancouver Games



Wedding photos by local photographers



Search, print, rate Journal Sentinel recipes

advertisement

BUY YOUR GOLF SHOW TICKETS
in advance and save!

golfshow
MILWAUKEE WISCONSIN
JOURNAL SENTINEL
jsentinel.com

March 5-7, 2010
State Fair Park
Wisconsin Exposition Center

[JSOnline](#) | [MyCommunityNOW](#) | [Living Lake Country](#) | [SportsBubbler](#) | [MilwaukeeMoms](#) | [Today's TMJ4](#) | [Newsradio 620](#) | [94.5 Lake FM](#)

PRIVACY POLICY/YOUR CALIFORNIA PRIVACY RIGHTS

| [Terms of Use](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Subscription Services](#) | [Place an Ad](#) | [About Our Ads](#)

© 2010, Journal Sentinel Inc. All rights reserved.

Powered by [Clickability](#).

Produced and Managed by [Journal Interactive](#).

