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Ovarian Cancer Survivors Education Colorado Doctors
COCA program raises awareness of symptoms, facilitates early detection

Through its Survivors Teaching Students: Saving Women's Lives® (STS) program, the Colorado Ovarian Cancer Alliance (COCA) is raising awareness of ovarian cancer among new doctors in Colorado.

"Right now, we present to third-year medical students at the University of Colorado School of Medicine every six weeks," says Susan Hess, COCA's Program Director. "For each program we have three presenters and team facilitator / moderator. Through the telling of personal stories, we inform them of the symptoms, risk factors and challenges of ovarian cancer so they will be able to diagnose the disease when it is in its earlier, most treatable stages."

The STS presentations, which last about an hour, typically include three women whose stories illustrate how difficult it can be to obtain an early diagnosis as well as the often resulting extended and recurring treatment. Following the presentations, open dialogue between the students and survivors is encouraged to enable direct and substantive interaction. A brief pre-test and post-test is given to the students to gauge their understanding of ovarian cancer symptoms and risk factors.

The Colorado Ovarian Cancer Alliance (COCA) is a partner member of the Ovarian Cancer National Alliance (OCNA) which developed the Survivors Teaching Students: Saving Women's Lives® program to enhance healthcare professionals' understanding of ovarian cancer symptoms and risk factors in order to facilitate earlier diagnosis and detection. Since there is no screening test for ovarian cancer, being able to recognize the symptoms, leading to early detection, is critical to saving lives. Also, symptoms of ovarian cancer are not specific to the disease and often mimics those of many other more common conditions, including digestive and bladder problems. However, when ovarian cancer symptoms are present, they tend to be persistent and worsen with time.

Primary symptoms of ovarian cancer include abdominal pressure or pain, fullness when eating a meal, urinary urgency, and bloating. Other symptoms may include gas or nausea, changes in bowel habits such as constipation or diarrhea, and low back pain.

If found in an early stage, up to 90% of women diagnosed will survive for more than five years. Unfortunately, 75% of diagnosed cases present at stages III and IV, when the disease has already spread beyond the ovaries. Although ovarian cancer makes up only 28% of gynecologic cancers, it accounts for 4% of gynecologic cancer deaths.

COCA is committed to educating healthcare students and medical professionals throughout Colorado. Organizations that provide training or continuing education to physicians, physician assistants, nurses and/or nurse practitioners and that are interested in having a team of ovarian cancer survivors address their group should contact COCA at 303-506-7014 or 800-428-0642.

COCA Board of Directors member John (Jody) Brammeier, whose wife Jodi died from ovarian cancer in August 2010, stresses the value and importance of the Survivors Teaching Students program. "If we

teach primary care physicians to recognize the signs of ovarian cancer and emphasize the importance of a gynecologic referral, they may improve the early detection of the disease. Women do not have to be sent home unaware that they have this disease. Awareness of symptoms and early diagnosis are critical to their improved chances for survival," he says.

Jodi Brammeier believed she would have discovered the cancer earlier if she had been more aware of the disease's symptoms. Following her Stage III diagnosis in January 2008, she was determined to create a race to promote awareness of ovarian cancer so that other women might find their cancer earlier and stand a better chance to win against the deadly disease. The race Jodi created, which first took place on June 5, 2010, had 1,700 plus participants and raised more than \$140,000 for the Colorado Ovarian Cancer Alliance.

Now officially designated as Jodi's Race for Awareness, the 2011 edition of the 5K run / walk is held the first Saturday of each June in Denver's City Park. For more information about the Colorado Ovarian Cancer Alliance please visit www.Colo-OvarianCancer.org.