

BSMS News story

### Screening for ovarian cancer did not reduce deaths

A large-scale randomised trial of annual screening for ovarian cancer did not succeed in reducing deaths from the disease, despite one of the screening methods tested detecting cancers earlier.

Sussex Health Outcomes, Research & Education in Cancer (SHORE-C), based at Brighton and Sussex Medical School, worked on the psychosocial aspects of the UK Collaborative Trial of Ovarian Cancer Screening (UKCTOCS) over the past 20 years, carrying out psychosocial assessments on more than 187,000 women. The results of the trial have now been published in the medical journal *The Lancet*.

In the UK, 4,000 women die from ovarian cancer each year. It is not usually diagnosed until it is at a late stage and hard to treat. UKCTOCS was designed to test the hypothesis that a reliable screening method that picks up ovarian cancer earlier, when treatments are more likely to be effective, could save lives.

The latest analysis looked at data from more than 200,000 women aged 50-74 at recruitment who were followed up for an average of 16 years. The women were randomly allocated to one of three groups: no screening, annual screening using an ultrasound scan, and annual multimodal screening involving a blood test followed by an ultrasound scan as a second line test.

The researchers found that, while the approach using multimodal testing succeeded in picking up cancers at an early stage, neither screening method led to a reduction in deaths.

Earlier detection in UKCTOCS did not translate into saving lives. Researchers said this highlighted the importance of requiring evidence that any potential screening test for ovarian cancer actually reduced deaths, as well as detecting cancers earlier.

“It is hugely disappointing to all the researchers involved and the amazing volunteers in the study that we could not show that screening for ovarian cancer and earlier detection saved lives from this horrid disease,” said Prof Dame Lesley Fallowfield, Director of SHORE-C, Professor of Psycho-Oncology at BSMS and co-investigator in the trial. “Nevertheless, this should not deter women with symptoms for seeking treatments all of which have improved over the past 20 years.”

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