

Cancer of the Uterus - 2006

The most common gynecologic cancer is that of the uterus. It will affect between two and three percent of women at some point in their lives.

The number of cases has been rising, most likely because of an increase in longevity of the population. Known risk factors that increase the chance of developing this cancer are obesity, late menopause and a personal history of breast cancer.

Lowered risk is observed in women who have taken birth control pills or given birth to many children. The current method of menopausal hormone replacement therapy does not appear to increase the chance of developing uterine cancer.

Although a routine pap smear may detect cancer of the uterus, there is no effective screening technique for detection of the disease.

Physicians rely on symptoms, namely irregular bleeding around the time of menopause or any bleeding after the menopause, to indicate the need for testing. The cancer is rare in younger women.

The vast majority of uterine cancers occur in the lining of the uterus and it is sampled to establish the diagnosis. Testing can be done by a biopsy in the office, employing local anesthesia, or in an outpatient hospital setting by means of a dilatation and curettage (D and C). Recently, ultrasound of the uterine lining has come into use as an additional tool for evaluation of abnormal bleeding.

The mainstay of treatment for uterine cancer is surgery, namely removal of the uterus, tubes and ovaries through an abdominal incision. After examination of the excised organs, some patients will be candidates for additional radiation therapy. Chemotherapy is utilized less

frequently. The treatment is in no way disfiguring and most women quickly return to their usual activities.

Despite the lack of effective screening, women can optimize the chance for successful treatment by seeking prompt medical attention for abnormal bleeding. Most uterine cancers are diagnosed in the earliest stage which leads to long term survival rates upwards of eighty-five percent.

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