

Early diagnosis, a multidisciplinary approach and access to new therapies, key in the treatment of ovarian cancer

- *PharmaMar is today hosting the 5th Ovarian Cancer Forum to share experience and the most recent therapeutic advances in this disease and thus improve its clinical approach.*
- *In Spain more than 3,000 new cases of ovarian cancer are diagnosed every year, a disease which is the seventh leading cause of cancer death among women.*

Cordoba, 6 May 2016. Promoting early diagnosis, treating the disease in specialized centers from a multidisciplinary perspective and fostering access to new therapies are three of the essential steps to be taken to improve the prognosis of ovarian cancer. This is one of the main conclusions set out today at the 5th Ovarian Cancer Forum hosted by PharmaMar at the Hospital Universitario Reina Sofía in Cordoba, with the aim of sharing experience and the most recent therapeutic advances in this disease, therefore improving its clinical approach. In Spain more than 3,000 new cases of ovarian cancer are diagnosed each year according to the Spanish Research Group on Ovarian Cancer (GEICO).

"Ovarian cancer is a devastating disease, albeit not frequent, as it only accounts for 4.8% of cases of cancer. However, it is the seventh leading cause of cancer death and the main cause due to gynecological tumors. This is largely because in most cases it is diagnosed too late. In fact, 75% of ovarian tumors are only detected at an advanced stage because of their lack of symptoms. This means that the survival rate is 70%-90% at five years for women in whom the disease is detected at an early stage, and less than 20% when the diagnosis is made at advanced stages", explained Dr María Jesús Rubio from the Medical Oncology department at the Hospital Universitario Reina Sofía in Cordoba and the coordinator of the Forum.

In her view, taking measures to foster early diagnosis of the disease is crucial to reduce this mortality rate. She thinks that the essential steps should include the continuing education of healthcare professionals. *"Ongoing training could help the primary care doctor to be aware of the warning symptoms of ovarian cancer, which include abdominal bloating, distension and pain and changes in urination, which in turn would lead to more diagnoses in the early stages of the illness. It is also important because, after diagnosis, appropriate treatment should be prescribed involving optimal cytoreductive surgery followed by appropriate adjuvant chemotherapy"*, added Dr Rubio.

New therapies and survival

Although there is much room for improvement in the prognosis of the disease and reducing the mortality rates associated with it, survival of ovarian cancer has improved over the last decade (34% for cases diagnosed between 1980 and 1985 and 44% for those diagnosed between 1990 and 1994, according to the Spanish Society of Medical Oncology) and this trend is expected to continue.

Along the same lines, Dr Andrés Poveda, Head of the Gynecologic Oncology Clinical Unit at the Valencian Institute of Oncology (IVO) and Chair of the Gynecologic Cancer InterGroup, explained that this improvement is due to advances in tackling the disease. *"Nowadays patients have access to appropriate surgery performed by specialists in gynecologic oncology. There have also been improvements in diagnosis as we have gained greater knowledge on the different types of tumors with the help of molecular biology, and we have a greater arsenal of medical treatment and targeted therapies which have finally become available for this disease"*, argued Dr Poveda.

In his view the new treatment options herald a better future for patients with ovarian cancer. *"We have more and more options that mean we can be optimistic about our patients. For example, we know about the activity of trabectedin (Yondelis®), especially in patients partially responsive to platinum, which has been shown to increase overall survival. In addition the advent of antiangiogenics and other therapies are great news for our patients as we can begin à-la-carte ovarian cancer treatment."*

On this point, Dr Antonio González, Head of Medical Oncology at the MD Anderson Cancer Center and Chair of the Spanish Research Group on Ovarian Cancer (GEICO), explained that the emergence of new therapies poses new challenges in addressing the illness. *"Today we have several treatment strategies", he says, "and the challenge for the oncologist is to select the most advantageous sequence for the patient"*.

The experts at the event believe that the emergence of new therapies must be accompanied by other measures that will also affect the prognosis of the disease, such as improving fair access to diagnosis and treatment, promoting a multidisciplinary approach, adopting international recommendations and fostering research.

"There are differences in the approach taken to the disease between Spain and its neighboring countries. Surgery is crucial but it is not implemented equally, not even within the same country. Nor is access to diagnostic, pathological or molecular imaging or access to new drugs equal. We have a pretty good level in our country, but we cannot rest on our laurels in research or enforcement of international guidelines or consensuses, such as the one we have recently updated in Tokyo in the worldwide Gynecologic Cancer InterGroup (GCIG)", said Dr Poveda.

For this specialist, the recommendation is obvious: ovarian cancer should be treated in specialized centers which have all the disciplines and specialities needed to deliver global treatment. *"Pathologists, radiologists, molecular biologists, etc. must be familiar with the disease. It is also crucial to involve psychologists and physiotherapists in treating ovarian cancer, to give some specific examples",* he added.

In the same vein, Dr Antonio González argued that *"multidisciplinary makes a difference in the treatment of a patient with ovarian cancer, as an optimal approach has been shown to impact overall survival"*.

Another key point to address is research. According to the experts, if insufficient resources are allocated to researching ovarian cancer, it will not be possible to better understand the disease or develop increasingly effective drugs to treat it. In



their view combined public and private sector efforts are needed. *“Research is expensive, but it always gives a return on investment. Defraying knowledge is in my view what makes societies and countries different, and should be supported by the state and by foundations or private entities as is customary in other first-world societies. If we improve we can also help societies with fewer resources, which is only fair whichever way you look at it”*, added Dr Poveda.

According to Dr González, *“cooperative clinical research in groups such as the GEICO enables patients to access new therapies and is the most important way of improving the medical treatment of patients with advanced ovarian cancer”*.

About PharmaMar

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