

Ovarian cancer subtypes are different diseases: Implications for biomarker studies

December 2 2008

In a new analysis of tissue biomarkers expressed in ovarian cancer samples, published by *PLoS Medicine*, David Huntsman and his colleagues from Vancouver General Hospital suggest that substantial differences exist between ovarian cancer subtypes which should be reflected in patient management. Although ovarian cancer is not the most common gynecologic cancer in women, the disease contributes a substantial burden of mortality in part because symptoms are nonspecific and the disease presents late in its course.

As part of their research, Huntsman and coworkers measured expression levels of 21 proteins in 500 ovarian cancer samples which had been collected by an ovarian cancer registry serving British Columbia, Canada; they then correlated expression of these biomarkers with patient survival data following standardized treatment. Their analyses studied associations between biomarker expression and survival for all cancers grouped together, as well as studying the five major ovarian cancer subtypes separately (high-grade serous, low-grade serous, clear cell, endometrioid, and mucinous carcinomas).

Although biomarker expression was stable across disease stages within a given subtype, the associations between specific biomarkers and disease outcome differed substantially between subtypes. As a result, the researchers propose that "our study offers persuasive evidence supporting the view that ovarian carcinoma subtypes are different diseases."

Citation: Köbel M, Kalloger SE, Boyd N, McKinney S, Mehl E, et al. (2008) Ovarian carcinoma subtypes are different diseases: Implications for biomarker studies. PLoS Med 5(11): e232.

doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.0050232

medicine.plosjournals.org/perl...journal.pmed.0050232

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Citation: Ovarian cancer subtypes are different diseases: Implications for biomarker studies (2008, December 2) retrieved 28 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2008-12-ovarian-cancer-subtypes-diseases-implications.html>

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