

# Experimental vaccine aimed at improving ovarian cancer survival rates

March 2 2012, By Amanda Harper

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An experimental vaccine study currently under way at the UC Cancer Institute aims to prevent ovarian cancer recurrence by triggering the body's natural defense system.

Offered exclusively through UC Health in the Greater Cincinnati area, this phase-2 clinical trial is open to women who have undergone treatment for ovarian, fallopian tube or peritoneal cancer and are currently in remission (cancer-free).

Sponsored by the National Cancer Institute's (NCI) Gynecologic Oncology Group, this is the first large-scale study in ovarian cancer to test a live vaccine that stimulates the body to produce substances to protect it. About 200 patients are expected to participate from across the United States. NCI estimates nearly 22,000 women were diagnosed with ovarian cancer and nearly 15,500 women died from the disease in 2011.

"The odds that a woman with ovarian cancer will relapse is almost 100 percent, so anything we can do to reduce that risk and prolong survival is critically important," says W. Edward Richards, MD, a UC Health gynecologic oncologist/surgeon and gynecologic oncology division director at the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine.

Patients enrolled to this [experimental vaccine](#) trial will be given a series of vaccinations over the course of two years.

Given as an injection under the skin, the ovarian cancer-specific vaccine

introduces antigens found in many [cancer cells](#)—particularly in the ovaries, fallopian tubes and peritoneal cavity—that will then circulate throughout the body and serve as cellular targets the immune system could then recognize as abnormal and destroy.

"Cancer is insidious partially because the body's natural [defense system](#) doesn't recognize the cancer cells as abnormal, allowing the cancer to go unchecked by the body's defense system," explains Richards, who serves as principal investigator of the Cincinnati arm of the study. "This specific [ovarian cancer](#) vaccine was designed to help the immune system recognize the cancer cells as abnormal—which it currently does not."

Researchers believe that if the [immune system](#) is stimulated to respond—via a medication or vaccine—to recognize these cancer cells as abnormal, it might help reduce the risk for [cancer recurrence](#).

Patients interested in participating in the study should call 513-584-5044 to request a screening appointment at the UC Health outpatient location in Clifton or West Chester. To learn more about the trial, visit [cancer.gov](#).

UC Health Gynecology Oncology is currently recruiting participants for numerous clinical trials looking at new treatment options for gynecologic cancers. This includes diseases that involve the cervix, ovaries, uterus, and vulva. Richards and his colleagues Heather Pulaski, MD, and Thomas Reid, MD, specialize in minimally invasive gynecologic surgery procedures, including robotic surgery.

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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