The Management of Anxiety and Knowledge of Serum CA-125 After an Ovarian Cancer Diagnosis

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This article describes the relationship among anxiety, distress, and serum CA-125 levels in women with ovarian cancer. Women’s anxiety about monitoring their CA-125 levels during chemotherapy also is discussed. Data from a randomized trial including self-reported anxiety and emotional distress of women following surgery after a primary diagnosis of ovarian cancer, their recorded serum CA-125 levels, and knowledge about their CA-125 levels were analyzed. In the sample, 26 of 30 women had serum CA-125 levels above the normal range. At baseline, the sample had an elevated mean anxiety score and an elevated distress score. A moderate association was found between a high serum CA-125 level and a high anxiety score at baseline, but the finding was not statistically significant. A negative nonsignificant relationship was found between a high serum CA-125 level and distress at baseline. The qualitative analysis revealed two themes: anxiety and lack of knowledge of serum CA-125. Oncology nurses and nurse practitioners caring for these women should provide essential information and strategies that can help guide women with ovarian cancer through the journey of their disease.

At a Glance

- Women with ovarian cancer experience anxiety and distress at diagnosis and during chemotherapy.
- Women with ovarian cancer who are informed of an elevated serum CA-125 may experience more anxiety compared to women who are uninformed about their CA-125 levels.
- Nurses should educate women with ovarian cancer about the meaning of serum CA-125 and assess their anxiety related to this biomarker.

“silent killer” (Devita, Hellman, & Rosenberg, 2000, p. 1598). When ovarian cancer is suspected, a pelvic examination; transvaginal ultrasound; and a computed tomography (CT) scan of the chest, abdomen, and pelvis are used to assess whether the...