Inherent biologic differences exist among and within various types of human cancer. Although tumors arise and proliferate from a single abnormal cell, they quickly become heterogeneous in their cellular composition, with some more differentiated than others. Historically, experimental work in histology (the microscopic structure of tissues), cytology (structure and function of cells), morphology (form and structure of living organisms), and epidemiology (incidence and prevalence of disease) has provided diverse phenotypes for various cancers. However, as molecular methods improve, synthesizing experimental evidence and thinking conceptually about the underlying rules that govern tumor development have become possible (Hanahan & Weinberg, 2000).

The purpose of this article is to apply the Hanahan and Weinberg (2000) conceptual framework for the development of cancer cells to biomarkers observed or expressed in ovarian cancer. Ovarian cancer was chosen as the tumor type because of the hallmarks of cancer (apoptosis, (d) limitless replicative potential, (e) sustained angiogenesis, and (f) tissue invasion and metastasis (Hanahan & Weinberg, 2000). Hanahan and Weinberg stated that “we foresee cancer research developing into a logical science, where the complexities of the disease, described in the laboratory and clinic, will become understandable in terms of a small number of underlying principles” (p. 57). The six rules are: (a) self-sufficiency in growth signals, (b) insensitivity to growth-inhibitory signals, (c) evasion of programmed cell death (apoptosis), (d) limitless replicative potential, (e) sustained angiogenesis, and (f) tissue invasion and metastasis.

The Hanahan and Weinberg conceptual framework attempts to synthesize existing knowledge about tumors and the rules required for malignant transformation. After a review of years of literature in cell biology, biochemistry, genetics, and clinical oncology, six rules were distilled regarding the development of tumor cells (Hahn & Weinberg, 2002; Hanahan & Weinberg, 2000). Hanahan and Weinberg stated that “we foresee cancer research developing into a logical science, where the complexities of the disease, described in the laboratory and clinic, will become understandable in terms of a small number of underlying principles” (p. 57). The six rules are: (a) self-sufficiency in growth signals, (b) insensitivity to growth-inhibitory signals, (c) evasion of programmed cell death (apoptosis), (d) limitless replicative potential, (e) sustained angiogenesis, and (f) tissue invasion and metastasis (Hanahan & Weinberg). Detailed information about each rule is presented in the following sections.