

# Awareness of the symptoms of ovarian cancer among women in the general population

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**Pathfinder 2016**

Transforming futures for women with ovarian cancer



## Introduction

The Ovarian Cancer Awareness Measure is a validated tool based on the wider Cancer Awareness Measure developed by Cancer Research UK, University College London, King's College London and Oxford University. It has been used by Target Ovarian Cancer as part of their Pathfinder study in 2009, 2012 and 2016.

## Methods

Telephone interviews were carried out by Opinion Leader using their in-house research team between 5 February and 1 March 2016. In total 1,343 women took part in the survey.



## Results

### Awareness of the symptoms of ovarian cancer

Chart 1 shows that while there has been some improvement in awareness of the symptom of bloating, overall there has been little change in awareness of the symptoms of ovarian cancer since the first Ovarian Cancer Awareness Measure in 2009.



**20%** of women able to name bloating as a symptom of ovarian cancer

### Low and misplaced confidence in spotting symptoms

Women were asked how confident they were at spotting a symptom of ovarian cancer and in 2016, 27 per cent said they felt confident, including four per cent who were very confident they could spot a symptom. This is little changed from 2009 and 2012.

However, as Table 1 shows, while women's ability to correctly identify a symptom does increase with their confidence in doing so, in many cases this confidence is often misplaced.

### Continued confusion with cervical cancer

More women now understand the distinction between cervical and ovarian cancer but as Table 2 shows, too many continue to wrongly believe that cervical screening also safeguards against ovarian cancer.

Chart 1. Ability of women in the general population to name one of the four main symptoms of ovarian cancer



\*The first Ovarian Cancer Awareness Measure was carried out before the publication of National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines on ovarian cancer and the recognition of increased urinary urgency/frequency as a symptom of ovarian cancer.

Table 1. Ability of those confident at spotting a symptom of ovarian cancer to name at least one recognised symptom

How confident are you that you would notice an ovarian cancer symptom?	Can name any recognised symptom (per cent)	
	Yes	No
Not at all confident	25	75
Not very confident	38	62
Fairly confident	52	48
Very confident	53	47

(Symptoms: persistent bloating, pelvic/abdominal pain, feeling full/loss of appetite, increased urinary urgency/frequency, unexplained weight loss, unexplained fatigue and unexplained changes in bowel habit.)

Table 2. Confusion over role of cervical screening

Year*	Does a cervical screening test detect ovarian cancer?
	Yes (per cent)
2012	47
2016	31

\*This question was introduced as a supplementary question within the Ovarian Cancer Awareness Measure from 2012 onwards.

## Conclusions

- Overall awareness of the symptoms of ovarian cancer among women in the general population remains low.
- The one symptom that has seen a small increase in awareness is bloating. This may reflect investment in local and regional pilots of Be Clear on Cancer awareness campaigns for ovarian cancer.
- Self-reported confidence in an individual's ability to spot cancer symptoms may not be an accurate measure of their ability to do so.
- There is still widespread confusion over the role of cervical screening and which cancers this covers.
- As National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines on ovarian cancer are refreshed, and reflecting changes in the general Cancer Awareness Measure, the Ovarian Cancer Awareness Measure should be evaluated with a view to updating it.