



# Simple test spots ovarian cancer

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A simple blood test that checks for five "fingerprints" of ovarian cancer has been found to be 94 per cent accurate, raising hopes the potentially deadly disease can be diagnosed earlier and treated more successfully.

Early results from phase two trials of the blood test, OvPlex, in Melbourne show it is more reliable than current tests, including one which looks for a single protein that can indicate the presence of ovarian cancer cells but can also be triggered by ovulation and menstruation.

In Australia, 1300 women are diagnosed with ovarian cancer each year and more than 900 die of the disease. There is currently no test to screen women across the community for early stages of the disease.

In the first trial of its kind, scientists from the Ovarian Cancer Institute of Melbourne's Women's Cancer Foundation have been using OvPlex to measure five different biochemical markers of ovarian cancer in a single

blood sample. They hope the test can be used to not only accurately diagnose women suspected of having the cancer, but eventually be used as a screening tool.

The Australian company which developed the test, HealthLinx, said results from 400 blood samples collected over the past 18 months showed the test was highly accurate, correctly diagnosing the presence of ovarian cancer cells while reducing the rate of misdiagnosis.

Ovarian cancer has traditionally been one of the most difficult cancers to treat because it has vague symptoms so by the time of diagnosis it has usually spread beyond the ovaries and into the abdomen, bladder and bowel.

Because there is no community based screening test for the cancer, more than 75 per cent of cases are diagnosed in the advanced stages and more than 80 per cent of these women will die within five years.

Yet if the disease is picked up at an early stage and treated effectively, the survival rate can jump to more than 80 per cent. HealthLinx said the trial

results had exceeded its expectations and it gave hope to women by increasing the chances of detecting the cancer at mid to late stages and if it recurred. The company said it aimed to have the test on the market by the middle of next year.

The National Ovarian Cancer Network, known as OvCa Australia, welcomed the results, which it said meant researchers were moving a step closer to having a reliable test to check for the cancer.

Chairman Simon Lee, whose wife Sheila died of ovarian cancer seven years ago, said there was a pressing need for an accurate test that could pick up the disease earlier.

"Prevention is always better than cure and while we mightn't necessarily get a screening test at this stage, any significant improvement in catching the disease early will hopefully . . . improve survival," Mr Lee said.

"But we still need a lot more investment because there are relatively few serious research groups doing this sort of work."