



## FERTILITY DRUGS AND OVARIAN CANCER

In 1992, Dr. Whittemore published a study that suggested a link between the use of fertility medication and the development of ovarian cancer. Since then, several studies have been published examining this issue. In October 1996, Drs. Bristow and Karlan reviewed the available studies. Their results indicate what has been said all along, namely, that infertility by itself is an independent risk factor for the development of ovarian cancer. That means, that women who never conceived have increased risk of ovarian cancer, regardless of whether they take medication or not. This correlation makes it difficult to determine whether there is an additional link between the use of fertility medication and ovarian cancer.

Since the review by Drs. Bristow and Karlan, another major study has been published. This study looked at all Danish women below the age of 60 years with ovarian cancer during the time from 1989 to 1994 and age matched controls. Again, women who had no children were found to have a higher risk of about a 1.5 to 2 fold of ovarian cancer. **This rather large study did not find any evidence that fertility drugs increased the risk of ovarian cancer, compared to no medical treatment.**

No one will claim that this most recent study has laid the issue to rest. Further studies are in progress and will be forthcoming. Previous studies have already established important points:

1. Treatment with clomiphene citrate (Serophene, Clomid) should not exceed 12 months or cycles.
2. There is no direct evidence that treatment with hCG increases the risk of ovarian cancer.
3. There is no direct evidence that treatment with hMG (Menopur), Gonal-F, Follistim or any injectable fertility medication increases the risk of invasive ovarian cancer.

In summary, available evidence is suggestive that infertility itself poses a risk for ovarian cancer. Currently, evidence that fertility medication causes invasive ovarian cancer has **not** been shown. However, further studies are ongoing and caution and vigilance is advised.