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Hormone tablet bid to beat ovarian cancer

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RESEARCHERS are developing a hormone tablet to prevent ovarian cancer, by capitalising on the way pregnancy, breastfeeding and the contraceptive pill all dramatically cut risk of the disease.

Three Australian researchers have been awarded a share of \$1.5 million from the Ovarian Cancer Research Foundation, to devise better treatments for the four women

diagnosed across the nation each day. In most women, the cancer will return and become resistant to chemotherapy.

Associate Professor Pradeep Tanwar, from the University of Newcastle, has been given \$566,000 to exploit the established link between hormones and ovarian cancer risk – with progesterone suppressing and oestrogen promoting growth of cancer cells – to develop the first preventive treatment. “Reproductive health plays an important role in whether you get ovarian can-

cer, even if you have a family history,” Associate Prof Tanwar said.

“We know that taking the oral contraceptive for five years gives you a 50 per cent reduction in your risk. Having your first child is almost a 40 per cent reduction, and breastfeeding is almost 30 per cent. We now want to look at the compounds already used for other conditions such

as fibroids, infertility or inducing ovulation in IVF to see if they have a prevention benefit.”

Melbourne’s Dr Maree Bilandzic, from the Hudson Institute of Medical Research, has been awarded \$800,000 to screen drugs already on the shelf – treatments used for everything from fungal infections, other cancers and anti-nausea therapies – to test their potential to fight ovarian cancer. Queensland’s Associate Professor Jason Lee, from the

QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute, has also been funded to develop a drug to make tumours more sensitive

to chemotherapy.

Melbourne mother Leane Flynn, who is facing ovarian cancer for the third time in two years, said effective treatments were urgently needed. “It’s the most lethal gynaecological cancer, and that there are virtually no symptoms and no prevention. It can’t continue this way,” Ms Flynn said.



SURVIVOR: Leane Flynn, with daughters Laura and Amelia, is fighting cancer.