

Test measures immune response to improve ovarian cancer diagnosis

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Researchers say they have developed a blood test that measures the body's own immune response to improve the diagnosis of ovarian cancer.

Ovarian cancer is one of the most common gynaecologic cancers with a high mortality rate. Approximately 300,000 new cases are diagnosed globally each year. An estimated 60 per cent of diagnosed patients die within five years after diagnosis.

The researchers say the new study found testing for a specific immune biomarker allows clinicians to identify whether growths on the ovaries are cancerous or not. This removes the need for tests like MRI scans or ultrasounds.

The clinical trial was conducted in two hospitals in Melbourne and the results published in *Scientific Reports*.

According to senior author and chief investigator, RMIT University's Professor Magdalena Plebanski, the test could be an important diagnostic tool for assessing suspicious ovarian growths before operations.

"Our new test is as accurate as the combined results of a standard blood test and ultrasound," said Professor Plebanski, a senior National Health and Medical Research Council Fellow at RMIT.

"This is especially important for women in remote or disadvantaged communities, where under-resourced hospitals may not have access to complex and expensive equipment like ultrasound machines or MRI scanners.

"It also means patients with benign cysts identified through imaging could potentially be spared unnecessary surgeries.

"This study looked at women with advanced ovarian cancer, but we hope further research could explore the potential for adding this biomarker to routine diagnostic tests at earlier stages of the disease."

The study used an immune marker for inflammation (IL-6) together with cancer markers to detect epithelial ovarian cancer in blood. Results were validated across two separate human trial cohorts.

"Ovarian cancer is the deadliest women's cancer, a statistic that has not changed in 30 years," continued Professor Plebanski.

"Every day in Australia, four women are diagnosed with ovarian cancer and three will die from the disease.

"Developing tests that are simpler and more practical may help get more women to hospital for treatment more effectively, with the hope that survival rates will improve."

The research was a collaboration with Monash University, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, University of Melbourne and Hudson Institute of Medical Research, with clinical trials held at the Royal Women's Hospital and Epworth Healthcare in Melbourne.

EnGeneIC recognised for nanocell platform

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Australian clinical-stage biopharmaceutical company [EnGeneIC](#) has been featured in the publication *InsightsCare* as one of the ten most innovative healthcare nanotech companies to watch.

The company is developing its EDV nanocell platform for use as a targeted cyto-immunotherapy in cancer.

It is now in Phase 2a clinical trials in patients with intractable cancers, including patients with metastatic pancreatic cancer, and is planning to commence further clinical trials in Australia and the US.

The December 2019 Issue of [InsightsCare](#) is focused on the convergence of nanotechnology and medicine.

EnGeneIC was selected based on the its development of the EDV nanocell. The technology can carry a payload directly to cancer cells while at the same time promoting an anti-tumour immune response.

Other companies described in the article include Spano Nanomedical, Nanoshell Company, ExonanoRNA and Zylo Therapeutics.

Companies caught in new compliance regime

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Many Australian-based companies are in the process of coming to terms with a new regulation focussed on slavery.

The federal Modern Slavery Act 2018 (Act) has created an annual reporting requirement for Australian-based companies - Australian and foreign entities - with revenue in excess of \$100 million.

These companies are required to prepare and publish a statement, from this year, explaining what they are doing to assess and address the risks of modern slavery to their Australian and global operations and supply chains.

The statement must be provided to the Australian Border Force and it will be published on a register.

However, the requirement goes beyond a statement like that required in the UK. Australian-based companies are required to provide detailed explanations of actions taken to identify, assess and mitigate the risks, as well as educate and train staff.

The requirement is also ongoing with companies having to assess themselves and act to continually reduce the risk of modern slavery in their supply chains.

Speaking in Parliament on the Bill in June 2018, Assistant Minister for Home Affairs Alex Hawke said, "This Bill will strengthen Australia's response to modern slavery by establishing a modern slavery reporting requirement."

"This significant initiative will shine a light into the shadows of global supply chains where modern slavery thrives. It will require large businesses to be transparent about their modern slavery risks and how they are being addressed," said Minister Hawke.

He continued, "Statements will need to address mandatory criteria set out in the Bill, including identifying the entity's key modern slavery risks and describing their actions to address these risks. These criteria will provide certainty for business about how to report and ensure statements can be easily compared.

"The bill also makes senior management accountable for the entity's modern slavery risks by requiring statements to be approved by the entity's principal governing body.

"The government will make all statements freely available online through a central, transparent, government-run register. The world-leading initiative will promote transparency and ensure that the community can easily access and compare statements."

Due Diligence Australia is a boutique Canberra-based consultancy that provides due diligence, risk management and compliance advisory services to the public, private and not for profit sectors. Its managing director, Felicity McNeill PSM, is well-known as a former senior Department of Health official but the organisation also includes a number of experienced former senior public servants.

Ms McNeill said the requirements in relation to how companies are able to demonstrate their compliance with the Act are significant and should not be understated. Companies that do not comply with the requirements will be named.