

Ulrika Joneborg - Summary on Ovarian Cancer Research

Ulrika Joneborg is a gynaecologist, sub specialized in gynaecological cancer surgery. Early in her career, she was fascinated both by cancer and surgery, and is now mainly working with ovarian cancer patients, who often need advanced and complex surgery. She has directed her research interest towards ovarian cancer as a way of improving knowledge of the disease and care of the patients.

Ovarian cancer is unfortunately the most lethal of all gynaecological cancers. Unlike some cancers, which have excellent screening programs that can find precancerous lesions, there are no successful screening methods for early detection of ovarian cancer, despite much international effort. On the contrary, ovarian cancer is frequently detected at advanced stages, when the tumour has spread to most of the abdomen or beyond, leading to a dismal long-time prognosis.

The aim of Ulrika Joneborg's research project is to improve the diagnosis of women with ovarian cancer, which will hopefully aid in early detection and optimize treatment strategies.

The research project uses conventional radiology together with a new tracer, which accumulates in the supporting tissue of the cancer cell, in order to more easily detect the tumours and their locations in the body. The project looks at three various groups of patients. The first group are patients with a localized ovarian tumour where the radiological technique aims to differentiate between benign and malignant ovarian tumours. This might lead to less extensive surgery for women who don't have ovarian cancer, and allow those who do to be treated effectively. The second and third groups are women who are considered for surgery after initially having been treated with chemotherapy to reduce the tumour burden or have a relapsed disease after previous treatment. In both groups the extent of the tumour spread is very important for planning the optimal treatment, where either surgery or oncological treatment can be the best option.

Joneborg's hope for the future in ovarian cancer research is to find more targeted therapies using the molecular and genetic expression of the tumour, and in that way being able to individualize treatment of ovarian cancer, making it more efficient.

The Lena Wäppling Foundation, as of year 2022, is broadening its investments in ovarian cancer research through awarding a special research grant to a junior researcher, and Joneborg is its first junior grant recipient. Joneborg states that “with this grant, we will be able to initialize this project”. Within the research project, Joneborg hopes to improve the diagnostics of ovarian cancer, but also identify other research questions that Joneborg’s team potentially could look into later on. Ulrika Joneborg’s goal is to “be able to better understand ovarian cancer and all the different aspects of it in order to improve early detection, individualize treatment and improve the prognosis of ovarian cancer.”

Ulrika Joneborg was interviewed by Elsa Samrud Sage.