

Treating the rarest of cancers

At times, people facing rare and aggressive cancer diagnoses may feel like there are no care options. OSF HealthCare Cancer Institute in Peoria, Illinois continues to expand care options for many types of cancers, including gynecologic carcinosarcoma.

Gynecologic carcinosarcomas are rare cancerous tumors, mainly impacting the uterus and ovaries, which take on characteristics of epithelial (develops from the cells that cover the ovaries or line the uterus) cancers, as well as sarcomas (develops in bones, cartilage, muscle, fat, blood vessels and more). It's estimated roughly two out of every 100,000 women will develop these rare tumors each year.

OSF has been able to treat patients with this very rare cancer before, but now with additional oncology specialists at OSF Cancer Institute, the teams are able to better serve these patients and offer them clinical trials as well.

Uniqueness of gynecologic carcinosarcoma:

"One of the things that is unique about it is that it could be coming from the uterus, it could be coming from the ovaries, and so we group those together as gynecologic carcinosarcoma as a treatment group," says Michelle Rowland, MD, a gynecologic oncologist with OSF HealthCare.

Chemotherapy and surgery are normally the treatment options doctors use to treat gynecologic carcinosarcoma. Proton therapy at OSF Cancer Institute offers the medical team an additional option in specific situations.

"We do use radiation sometimes," Dr. Rowland says. "In terms of proton therapy, there could be options for that which would add something unique, depending on where the cancer is occurring at that time. We also have investigational studies and expertise in investigational pharmacy and managing trials. This offers some options for patients."

Dr. Rowland and her team in Peoria have opened one clinical trial for patients with gynecologic carcinosarcoma. Additionally, Dr. Rowland says she is working to launch a study with the University of Alabama-Birmingham, which is currently focused on carcinosarcoma. OSF Cancer Institute specialists have a weekly tumor board meeting to put a multi-disciplinary approach together to help each patient, providing individualized care for them.

"We're putting together a think tank with experts across the country in this field," Dr. Rowland says. "We know some of the latest and greatest in terms of what to try, and we're also working on getting clinical trials open specifically for patients with carcinosarcoma."

The goal of the clinical trial is to find a treatment plan that works better than the current options. By learning more about the molecular basis of these tumors, the clinical trials can hopefully lead to better outcomes.

Concerning signs and symptoms:

"Very similar to ovarian and endometrial cancers, we're often worried about patients who have vaginal bleeding when they shouldn't, like post-menopausal women with bleeding," Dr. Rowland says. "Abdominal bloating, nausea and vomiting; symptoms where your bowel or your bladder are changing. These are things we'd recommend you reach out to a physician for a workup. It's most likely going to be something else, but it could be something like this."

Dr. Rowland worked on a carcinosarcoma clinical trial during her fellowship, so she has a real passion for finding the best care plans for patients now. She hopes this care and expertise will attract people not only within the Peoria community but far beyond as well to come to Peoria for treatment.

Patients can contact the [Breakthrough Treatment Center](#) and find out what treatment options are available. If interested in participating in a clinical trial, people can call 1-844-OSF-4-HOPE (1-844-673-4467).