

Venus Appeal – Press Release  
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## **Women urged to ‘be aware of what’s down there’ during Gynae Cancer Awareness Week**

*National gynaecological cancer awareness campaign launched*

The first national campaign to raise awareness of cancers which kill almost 7,500<sup>1,2</sup> women per year will take place from 18 – 22 September 2006.

Every year over 17,000 women are diagnosed with one of the four main gynaecological cancers; ovarian, cervical, endometrial (womb) and vulval.

Stigma and embarrassment still surround these cancers, which can lead to a delay in women going to the doctor.<sup>3</sup> Any delay to diagnosis can lead to significantly worse survival rates compared to women who were treated earlier.<sup>4</sup>

The campaign, called the Venus Appeal, believes many deaths from gynaecological cancer could be prevented, if women knew more about the signs and symptoms. The Venus Appeal aims to encourage women to be more aware of the four main gynaecological cancers, and to consult their GP if they have any concerns.

The Venus Appeal will be launched with activities all over the country, including: simultaneous city centre events in Liverpool, Preston and Manchester on Monday 18 September at 1pm; the latter two cities featuring the release of balloons with Venus Appeal tags. Other activities include partnerships with local radio stations, such as Key 103 & Magic FM in Manchester, who will be conducting a street campaign across Greater Manchester and Cheshire throughout the week.

Karen Donnelly, Gynaecological Cancer Nurse Specialist at St Mary's Hospital, Manchester is one of the spokespeople for the Venus Appeal. She said: "Our bodies below the belt are a no-go area. As a society we don't want to discuss gynaecological problems, which is such a tragedy. Women are dying every day because of this silence."

"The Venus Appeal wants to help women get to know their bodies and be familiar with the symptoms of gynaecological cancer. We want women to know when

something is wrong and have the confidence to go to their GP or Well Woman clinic straight away to talk about their concerns.”

Unlike breast cancer, gynaecological cancers are still subject to significant stigma. Lucy Smith and colleagues from the University of Southampton investigated why people delay going to the doctor when they have symptoms of cancer. Writing in a recent paper in the Lancet they report: “Fear of embarrassment was related to the discussion of sensitive or sexual areas of the body and invasiveness of physical examinations. Such fears were not reported in studies of women with breast cancer.”

Dr Cath Holland of St Mary’s Hospital is one of the doctors involved with the Venus Appeal. She said: “Too many women put off going to the doctor because they are embarrassed by sexual matters. Doctors understand this and will be very sympathetic to these concerns, but cancer is cancer wherever it occurs in the body. It is most important to identify the problem quickly and get treatment started without delay. Gynaecological cancers can affect women of all ages and can occur regardless of social class, ethnic background or sexual orientation. No-one should delay seeking advice because they feel embarrassed.”

Although if caught early gynaecological cancers can be very effectively treated, often the diagnosis is delayed because of the diverse and often subtle symptoms.

Lucy Smith and colleagues also looked at the impact of difficult-to-spot symptoms. They found: “Fear of embarrassment was a strong theme; women who delayed, especially those with diverse symptoms, worried about being labelled as neurotic, a hypochondriac, or a time-waster. Women worried that symptoms would be attributed to the menopause.”

To help women know they are not wasting anyone’s time, Venus Appeal posters and leaflets are being made available through doctor’s surgeries and online at [www.venusappeal.org](http://www.venusappeal.org)

The simple leaflet provides fast facts on vulval, endometrial, cervical and ovarian cancer, along with the signs and symptoms for women to look out for. These include:

- Abnormal bleeding (particularly in women after the menopause) or discharge
- Bleeding between periods

- Swelling or pain in the abdomen
- Itching, soreness or any changes to the skin

Following four successful years concentrating on the Manchester region as Gynae Cancer Awareness Week, the Venus Appeal has been expanded to a national campaign.

The Venus Appeal, which is in the process of becoming a charity, is organised by a group of doctors and nurses across the UK, along with women affected by gynaecological cancers. The campaign will link into the existing support infrastructure provided by the major cancer charities such as Cancerbackup and Macmillan Cancer Support and other specialist gynaecology cancer organisations.

To raise funds and help publicise the campaign, colourful Venus Appeal pin badges will be available at events around the country.

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**For further information, copies of the leaflet, interviews with spokespeople for the Venus Appeal or women affected by gynaecological cancer, please contact:**

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**Notes to editors:**

For the four most common gynaecological cancers, the latest available figures for incidence (Cancer Research UK 2002) and mortality (Cancer Research UK 2004) are:

<b>Cancer type</b>	<b>Incidence</b>	<b>Deaths</b>
Ovarian	6,959	4,434
Endometrial	5,965	1,592
Cervical	2,841	1,093
Vulval*	996	364
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16,761</b>	<b>7,483</b>

\* Latest available data from 2000.

<sup>1</sup> <http://info.cancerresearchuk.org/cancerstats/types/> (accessed 11th August 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Management of vulval cancer. Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. January 2006. Page 3.

<sup>3</sup> Smith LK, Pope C, Botha L. Patients' help-seeking experiences and delay in cancer presentation: a qualitative synthesis. Lancet 2005;366:825-31.

<sup>4</sup> <http://sci.cancerresearchuk.org/labs/pog/delay.html> (accessed 11th August 2006).