Ovarian cancer is often detected at an advanced stage, which generally results in a poor prognosis and poor survival rate. Early detection is the key to improved survival among women with ovarian cancer.

CA125 is, to date, the best known test for ovarian cancer diagnosis. It is the serum marker most widely used to monitor therapeutic response, and to detect disease or disease recurrence in patients treated for epithelial ovarian cancer. However, only about 85% of all women with ovarian cancer have raised CA125, only 50% of women with early stage ovarian cancer have raised CA125, approximately 20% of ovarian cancers lack expression of CA125, and women with other, or benign, conditions can also have raised CA125 levels.

HE4 is a new marker for ovarian carcinoma, which is over-expressed in patients with ovarian, and some other cancers. Normal ovarian tissue has minimal production of HE4. When combined with CA125, HE4 significantly raises the level of sensitivity for the detection of ovarian cancer. HE4 is consistently expressed in patients with ovarian cancer and has demonstrated an increased sensitivity and specificity over that of CA125 alone.

A Risk of Ovarian Malignancy Algorithm (ROMA) classifies patients as being at low or high risk for malignant disease using both the CA125 and HE4 results and a woman’s menopausal status. This risk is given as an adjunct to the test results for both CA125 and HE4. ROMA calculates a risk of finding ovarian cancer during surgery. ROMA classifies patients as being at low or high risk for malignant disease.

HE4 complements CA125 measurement in patients with ovarian cancer by providing improved sensitivity at fixed levels of specificity. This enhancement in sensitivity has been used to develop the ROMA algorithm that helps triage of women with adnexal mass to appropriate clinical/surgical management.

HE4 is CE marked as an aid in estimating the risk of epithelial ovarian cancer in premenopausal and postmenopausal women.

To order postal pathology packs for HE4 testing, please contact HE4@tdlpathology.com or Annette Wilkinson on 020 7307 7343.

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