

# action

## Meet Dr Brooke

Our new  
ambassador  
shares why  
ovarian cancer is  
a cause close to  
her heart

**RAISING  
AWARENESS**  
How you  
helped spread  
the word for  
Gynae Cancer  
Awareness  
Month this year



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0207 380 1730

info@ovarian.org.uk

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# Hello



## Welcome to our winter edition of Action magazine



As 2020 draws to a close and we reflect on the challenges that life has thrown our way this year, we can't help but feel grateful. Your continued support has in turn helped us to support our community when it's needed us the most, and, although much of our research was put on pause, you have helped us to get our scientists back in the lab and start making up for lost time. There's still a long way to go, but we know we can do it with amazing people like you by our side.

Now more than ever, collaboration is vital for us to continue serving our ovarian cancer community. We're working with the NHS and healthcare professionals to ensure that anyone experiencing the symptoms of ovarian cancer goes to the GP and is seen quickly and safely.

We continue to work with our friends at support charity Ovacome to deliver our Staying Connected programme, providing information and support for anyone affected by ovarian cancer throughout the pandemic

and helping them to feel less alone. Most importantly, you've been amazing in your unwavering support – from sharing our new symptom awareness campaign on your social media channels, to adapting your fundraising plans to raise money for ovarian cancer research, despite Government restrictions. You've helped us keep moving forward in our quest to make ovarian cancer a survivable disease and on behalf of everyone at Ovarian Cancer Action, the researchers we fund, and the women we do it all for, thank you.

We know Coronavirus may have made things tough for you too and you have already done so much, but if you are able to donate, you can find our donation form at the back of the magazine or you can visit [ovarian.org.uk/donate](https://ovarian.org.uk/donate). Thank you for making our work possible.



**Cary Wakefield**  
Chief Executive

# News in brief

**From leaving our office to launching the UK's first Hereditary Cancer Awareness week, it's been a year like no other.**

## Staying Connected

As we reflect on the last 12 months, we can see that cancer referrals and treatment levels are gradually returning to pre-pandemic levels. Whilst this is good news, there is still work to be done and we are working alongside the NHS to address regional variations in cancer referrals that have arisen.

We know it can be confusing keeping up to date with government guidelines for those they identify as clinically extremely vulnerable, so we'll continue to update the Covid Hub on our website to reflect any changes in guidance as part of our Staying



Connected programme, in partnership with Ovacome. Take a look at our webinars too as, now more than ever, it's good to talk.

## Gone but not forgotten

In October we said goodbye to John Harris, a man without whom Ovarian Cancer Action would not exist. You can read his story on page 10. It has also been a year since we lost VJ, the woman behind our 'I Will Survive' campaign.



VJ was diagnosed with ovarian cancer herself, and made it her mission to put the disease in the spotlight and highlight the important need for research. Our 'I Will



Survive' campaign has now reached millions of people across the UK and has even inspired an Australian awareness film too.

## Raising awareness

Did you see our brand new symptom awareness campaign? Many people have been putting off visiting their GP due to concerns about catching Covid-19, but we're here to make sure women know the symptoms and that it's vital to get them checked out. Find out more on page 6.

We've been busy raising awareness of hereditary cancer too. Conditions like BRCA mutations and Lynch syndrome are responsible for 17% of ovarian cancer cases, so we launched our very first Hereditary Cancer Awareness Week in September. Find out more on page 8.

## Saying goodbye to our office

We've been blown away by how many of you have found creative ways to continue supporting us despite most of our fundraising events being cancelled this year. And just as you have successfully adjusted your plans to adhere to lockdown and social distancing, we made the decision to move out of our London office in Camden.

The office had been our home for the last ten years, and moving out wasn't

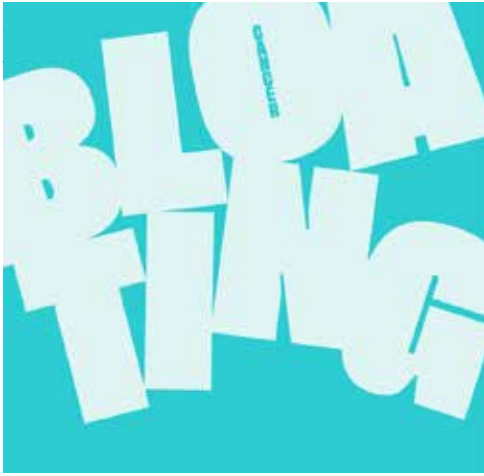


without its challenges, but our team needs to stay safe at home. Most importantly the money that we save on renting a space is incredibly valuable for ovarian cancer

research. Although we're working in a different way, we are united in our work to help more women survive ovarian cancer and we're as motivated as ever.



**OUR CANCER PREVENTION  
OFFICER JO, AND SUPPORTERS  
CARLA AND GABY, RAISING  
AWARENESS OF BRCA MUTATIONS**

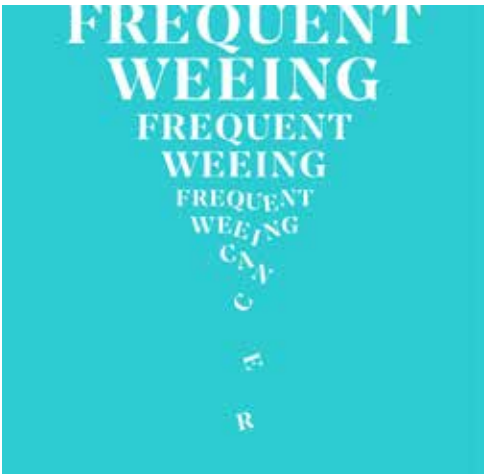


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## Raising awareness together

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Ovarian cancer doesn't stop, so neither do we. Come rain or shine, raising awareness of the disease and its symptoms is what we do.



The earlier a woman is diagnosed with ovarian cancer, the better her chance of survival. Yet 90% of women, and even some GPs, don't know the four main symptoms.

So whilst our scientists work hard to develop a screening tool for the disease, raising awareness of the symptoms is one of the most powerful things we can do right now to look after the women we love.

## Hidden symptoms

Symptoms such as persistent bloating, stomach pain, needing to wee more frequently and difficulty eating are all signs of ovarian cancer. And although, more often than not, they are signs of something far less serious, we want to encourage all women experiencing them to get checked by their GP, to rule out ovarian cancer or ensure cases are diagnosed as early as possible.

September is Gynaecological Awareness Month and this year we launched our brand new symptoms awareness campaign to shine a light on ovarian cancer – a disease that's often overlooked, misunderstood or misdiagnosed.

Our new symptoms awareness video and accompanying images show the word "cancer" hiding behind the four main ovarian cancer symptoms. It highlights the idea that these symptoms are often very hard to detect and even if a women experiences them, she may not know that they could be a sign of cancer.

Thanks to so many of you sharing the campaign on social media, we've been able to reach hundreds of thousands of women across the UK with this potentially life-saving information.

## Your GP wants to see you

Raising awareness to improve early diagnosis has always been a vital part of our mission to give all women the very best chance of survival. And due to a significant

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Symptoms are often mistaken for less serious conditions like IBS
- Ovarian cancer is the UK's deadliest gynae disease, claiming the life of another woman in the UK every two hours
- One in four women mistakenly think their smear test will detect the disease
- Ovarian cancer kills more women in the UK than womb, cervical, vulval and vaginal cancers combined
- Ovarian cancer can affect women of all ages

drop in referrals because of Covid-19, we know this is now more important than ever. Which is exactly why we've been asking for your help to spread the word.

"Before the Covid pandemic, more than 50% of ovarian cancer cases were diagnosed late due to a challenging combination of low awareness and vague symptoms," says Cary Wakefield, CEO of Ovarian Cancer Action. "Now, coronavirus is deterring many women from seeking the medical help they need, putting even more lives at risk.

"That's why we're calling on you - our dedicated and passionate community to help us empower women with the symptom information and confidence they need to contact their doctor quickly if there's something wrong. GP surgeries are open and we need to help women get there. Together, we can help more women survive ovarian cancer than ever before."

### TAKE ACTION

Visit [ovarian.org.uk/awareness](https://ovarian.org.uk/awareness) to watch and share our new symptoms awareness video. You can also download your free digital awareness pack and help us spread the word on social media. Don't forget to tag us in your posts!



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# Hereditary Cancer Awareness Week

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**Back in the autumn, we launched the UK's first week dedicated to hereditary cancer.**

The week took place on 28th September - 5th October, to raise much-needed awareness of the genetic faults that increase our risk of certain cancers and connect those at risk with experts, information, and of course, each other. Our latest research revealed

75% of people had not heard of BRCA mutations and a staggering 84% of Lynch syndrome, despite them being the cause of around 17% of ovarian cancer cases.

Throughout Hereditary Cancer Awareness Week, we held insightful webinars

on everything from risk-reducing surgery and exploring the different types of Hormone Replacement Therapy that treat the surgical menopause, to how to talk to relatives about genetic risk, starting a family, and more. The week was packed with useful



### Join our online community

As part of our on-going partnership with Ovacom, we will continue to run these two popular online sessions, alongside our monthly e-newsletter.

#### MASTECTOMY CHATTER WITH CHRISTEN WILLIAMS

“Cancer is usually unpredictable but not in our case. My mother’s cancer could have been prevented, if only we knew.” Join



CHRISTEN WILLIAMS

Christen Williams aka @BRCACHatter to discuss everything related to BRCA and risk-reducing mastectomies - from preparing for surgery and what to pack for hospital, to what to expect in recovery.

#### BRCA CIRCLE

Join our monthly get together on Zoom for anyone living with a BRCA mutation. It’s a welcoming space to ask questions and make friends.

#### STAY IN THE LOOP

Sign up to our monthly e-newsletter dedicated to all things related to hereditary risk. We’ll update you with the latest news, clinical trials and more so you don’t miss a beat.

information and we’re so glad that you could join us.

### Have you heard of BRCA?

We all have BRCA genes – they help our bodies fight cancer. If there’s a fault in a BRCA1/2 gene, our risk of certain cancers goes up.

Ovarian, womb, breast, prostate, and bowel cancer are some of the cancer types you’re more likely to get if you carry a BRCA mutation or Lynch syndrome, which can be passed from a parent to their child.

Risk-reducing surgery and regular health checks could help prevent around 1,000 ovarian cancer cases each year, or help diagnose them early. Up to 2,758 breast cancer cases could

be prevented too, as 5% are linked to genetic variations like BRCA.

Identifying and supporting those at risk of hereditary cancer is a huge cancer prevention opportunity and an important part of our mission to make ovarian cancer a survivable disease.

Our Cancer Prevention Officer Jo Stanford, said: “We must do everything we can to prevent cancer, both for patients and for the future of our NHS. Genetic testing offers the opportunity for us to prevent hereditary cancer before it even develops, or at worst,

catch it in its earliest stages when it is most survivable. This could save so many families from the pain cancer can cause. Along with genetic counsellors, we want to ensure individuals can make informed decisions around screening, preventative surgeries and its considerations, such as family planning.”



JO STANFORD

#### FIND OUT MORE

Visit our Hereditary Hub to find out more about BRCA and Lynch syndrome: [ovarian.org.uk/brca](https://ovarian.org.uk/brca)

# Remembering John Harris

**John Harris, founder of the Helene Harris Memorial Trust (HHMT) that led to the inception of Ovarian Cancer Action, has passed away.**

When his wife Helene was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 1984, John Harris was determined to seek the best treatment and specialists, but despite their best efforts, within a few months, ovarian cancer sadly claimed Helene's life. But even in grief, the Harris family's first instinct was always to act.

Together with renowned gynaecologist, the late Sir George Pinker, John resolved to set up the Helene Harris Memorial Trust (HHMT) International Forum on Ovarian Cancer - a global collaboration that would bring the world's leading scientists together to pool knowledge on ovarian cancer, share best practice, determine the direction of research and publish its findings around the world.

HHMT's first meeting,



**“In our international collaboration, his legacy will live on.”**

CEO of Ovarian Cancer Action, Cary Wakefield

in 1986, was a storming success and paved the way for the 14 successful meetings we have held since. Our latest Forum, held just last year, was led by Professor Fran Balkwill OBE and John's daughter, Allyson Kaye MBE. It brought together the greatest minds to explore how immunotherapy could help to create kinder and more effective treatments for ovarian cancer patients.

## A lasting legacy

“John had an enormous impact on ovarian cancer research, bringing together clinicians and scientists from across the globe at a time when there was no internet communication,” shares Fran Balkwill, Professor of Cancer Biology at Barts Cancer Institute and Chair of the HHMT Programme Committee. “John established an innovative, collaborative and multidisciplinary network that still endures to this day. It is one of the privileges of my life to have known John; he generated something so positive from a personal tragedy. A memorable, multi-faceted man who made a difference to so many.”

Professor Robert C. Bast Jr, Chair of the OCA Scientific Advisory Board, said: “John is one of the most exceptional people

I have ever known. The idea of the HHMT was brilliant. His vision created so many collaborations and friendships, but also gave us a chance to assess our progress as an ovarian cancer research community.”

### The start of OCA

John’s daughter Allyson founded Ovarian Cancer Action to fund the awareness work and research that the HHMT Forum had identified the UK desperately needed. After just three years, the Ovarian Cancer Action Research Centre, Europe’s first ever centre dedicated to ovarian cancer research, opened its doors in 2006. To date, Ovarian Cancer Action has funded £12.3 million of research projects and continues to fund research at its Centre and other leading institutions around the UK.

“John was an extremely talented businessman and he brought that same success to HHMT and Ovarian Cancer Action,” said Cary Wakefield, CEO of Ovarian Cancer Action. “In the 1980s, most people hadn’t even heard of ovarian cancer. He did something extraordinary in bringing together the world’s leading experts and now our progress knows no boundaries. In our international collaboration, his legacy will live on.”



## Staying Connected through winter

It’s been a tough year for everyone, but it’s been especially challenging for those of you who have had to shield, or have been unable to see friends and family due to the coronavirus.

Since April, we’ve partnered with our friends at Ovacome to deliver our Staying Connected programme, designed to help our community feel connected, supported and informed during these difficult times.

Working together, we are ensuring that there are ways for the ovarian cancer community to stay in touch

and continue to empower themselves with information about the changing government guidance, and how they can support their personal health and wellbeing.

Our Staying Connected service includes informative videos, interviews, and interactive video sessions where you can speak to experts directly and ask them your questions. The service is really easy to use and we have staff at the ready to help anyone with questions.

To find out more, visit [ovarian.org.uk/stayingconnected](https://www.ovarian.org.uk/stayingconnected)

**ovacome..**  
The ovarian cancer support charity

**ovarian.  
canceraction**

# Here's to you!

Discover the special and creative ways our community has found to support ovarian cancer research.

## TRACK RECORD

Back in the 70s, retired railwayman Chris Milner inherited an old railway station name plate from his friend and colleague, Dave. He had no idea of the impact it would one day have.

Chris stored it in his garage until earlier this year when he offered it to a local restaurant called The Junction. Shortly after, a woman had asked if the sign was for sale, as her husband was a collector. The couple offered £700 for the sign.

Chris explained he had lost his wife Carol to ovarian cancer just a few years ago so if he sold the sign, the proceeds would be donated to Ovarian Cancer



LAURENCE AND CHRIS

Action. On hearing the money would go to a charity, the collector upped his price to £900 and left the restaurant the new owner of a piece of railway history.

Chris's generous £900 donation is just the tip of the iceberg. Since Carol's passing in 2016, the Milner family has held sponsored walks, awareness talks, choir concerts and taken part in bucket collections. Chris and Carol's son Laurence even cycled from Glasgow to London, raising almost £3,000. Malcolm, their eldest son, trained for the Marathon and raised sponsorship, but sadly had to withdraw due to injury.

Chris said: "We make a special effort to raise money for Ovarian Cancer Action's research and awareness work every year. So many people haven't even heard of ovarian cancer and passing the message on is what it's all about. As a family we want to help prevent this happening to other families in the future and we're willing to do whatever it takes."



CHRIS HANDS OVER THE SIGN TO ITS NEW OWNER AT THE JUNCTION

**FOR SUE**

Derrick Boniface and his wife Sue talked about leaving a legacy that will improve the lives of women with ovarian cancer, before Sue sadly passed away from the disease herself at just 52 years young.

“Just before she died, my wife said that if I were to give any funds to a charity, she would prefer that the charity be focused on finding a solution to this cancer,” said Derrick. “I’ve seen firsthand what this cancer strain can do to a loved one – and shared her



emotional path in trying to find a solution to the cancer and the side-effects of chemotherapy treatments. It’s not much fun!

“I hope that my legacy assists Ovarian Cancer Action in continuing its approach to achieve its well

thought through objectives, ensuring all connected professionals and interested parties involved in supporting a woman with ovarian cancer, are working together.”

“I certainly don’t underestimate the challenge here, but the work being done in this area will surely bring hope to those caught up in this emotional roller coaster journey.”

**For more information about leaving a gift in your will, visit [ovarian.org.uk/legacy](http://ovarian.org.uk/legacy)**

**JANET’S GLOBAL MARATHON**

Janet Mackechnie was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in August 2019. Just over a year later, she organised a global relay to fundraise for ovarian cancer research.

Janet took her fundraising worldwide with a little help from her friends and family, enlisting a team running in London,



Suffolk, Edinburgh, Isle of Tiree, Amsterdam, Igstri Island (Greece), Melbourne, Canberra, Delhi, and Washington DC.

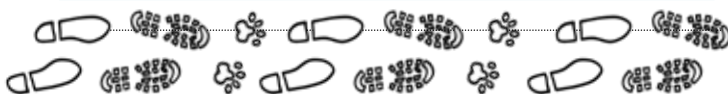
As the sun rose in each location on Sunday 4th October, the team members – united in spirit – joined together to run their collective relay, sharing their progress on social media as they ran 43 miles around the world, raising an incredible

£3,400. Janet says “I feel extremely proud to have brought everyone together to raise funds for Ovarian Cancer Action at this difficult time when as much support as possible is required to continue vital research. To connect and raise awareness across the globe felt particularly powerful and showed how much can be achieved even in the time of Covid restrictions.”

**TAKE ACTION**

Now more than ever, we need your support to help women with ovarian cancer. Email us today to order your free fundraising pack [fundraising@ovarian.org.uk](mailto:fundraising@ovarian.org.uk)

Thank you to everyone who took part in our Step Challenge this summer. Together you walked, skipped, ran and jumped **26,890,828** steps, raising a grand total of **£30,224!**



# Five minutes with...

## Dr Brooke Vandermolen Obs and Gynae Registrar and our new Ambassador



### How did you come to be an OCA ambassador?

My family has supported OCA for many years, ever since my aunt passed away from the disease aged just 48. Once I began training in Obstetrics & Gynaecology, I began helping to translate scientific information into easy-to-understand concepts for OCA.

### Who was your biggest role model growing up?

My grandfather was one of the smartest and yet humblest people I have ever known.

### What do you consider to be your greatest success?

Getting my research published in the American Journal of Obstetrics

& Gynaecology. Outside of work, I'm very proud of my Instagram account, @theobgynmum, where I provide reliable information about women's health, pregnancy and parenting.

### And greatest failure?

I constantly feel like I am failing at finding the right balance between work and parenting, but that is probably the same for all mothers! We are never particularly kind to ourselves.

### If you could share one piece of advice, what would it be?

If you have a feeling that something in your body is not right, don't dismiss it. Never worry you are wasting someone's time!

### SNAP POLL

#### What's your guilty pleasure?

Netflix! Right now I'm loving *Selling Sunset* and *Emily in Paris*!

#### What's your favourite book?

1984 by George Orwell, and *Still Alice* by Lisa Genova. I love books that I can get lost in, or make me see the world differently.

#### Favourite shop? & Other Stories

#### Favourite film?

*When Harry Met Sally* or *The Graduate* are my ideal night in.

#### Favourite food?

Sushi!

#### How do you unwind?

Yoga – it always boosts my mental health.

### What keeps you motivated when times are tough?

Knowing I may make a difference to even one person.

### The best thing you've learned during lockdown?

To be grateful for the little things, like health and having a roof over our heads. We take these things for granted.

# Dates for your diary

## Walk In Her Name

March 2021

Organise a sponsored walk or take on our virtual Step Challenge and raise funds during Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month. Together, we can take steps towards a world where more women survive ovarian cancer.

## Royal Parks Half Marathon

11 April 2021

Starting and finishing in Hyde Park, you will join 16,000 runners to take part in the 13.1 mile route through Central London, taking in the spectacular sites of the capital and the beautiful Royal Parks.

## Women V Cancer Ride the Night

29 May 2021

Soak up the electric atmosphere with motivational music,



speeches and warm-ups at the Royal Windsor Racecourse before lighting up London with your bright pink Ride the Night vests and the sparkling Women V Cancer spirit.

## Women V Cancer London to Brighton Bike Ride

4 July 2021

Kick off bright and early in South London with a fun warm-up before conquering 100km of our clearly marked and marshalled route to the famous Brighton Pier.

## Great North Run

12 September 2021

Lace up your trainers to help ovarian cancer research stay on track. Join thousands

of runners from across the UK and take part in the iconic Great North Run. The 13.1 mile course begins in Newcastle upon Tyne and is lined with supporters all the way to the finish line in South Shields.

## Virgin Money London Marathon

3 October 2021


Join us for the Virgin Money London Marathon 2021! The world famous 26.2 mile course starts in Greenwich and takes in some of London's most iconic sites including Tower Bridge and Big Ben.

**To find out more, visit  
[ovarian.org.uk/challenges](https://www.ovarian.org.uk/challenges)**

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483 Green Lanes, London, N13 4BS

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# Join Team OCA at the Great North Run

**New date  
announced**  
Sunday  
12 September  
2021

**Lace up your trainers to help ovarian cancer research stay on track. Join runners from across the UK and take on the iconic 13.1 miles of the Great North Run, stretching from Newcastle upon Tyne all the way to South Shields.**

## **Register today**

Secure your place for £15 with a fundraising target of £500.

Visit [ovarian.org.uk/challenges](https://www.ovarian.org.uk/challenges), call 0207 380 1730 or contact us on [fundraising@ovarian.org.uk](mailto:fundraising@ovarian.org.uk)