

STATEMENT OF BETH Y. KARLAN, MD

BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE, DRUG POLICY AND
HUMAN RESOURCES

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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify at today's hearing. I am honored to be here and heartened by the interest of the subcommittee in this important issue.

My name is Beth Karlan, and I practice medicine at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, California, where I am the Director of The Women's Cancer Research Institute, the Division of Gynecologic Oncology and the Gilda Radner Hereditary Cancer Detection Program. I am also Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the UCLA Geffen School of Medicine.

This year I was elected to serve as President of The Society of Gynecologic Oncologists, or SGO. Our organization's purpose is to improve the care of women with gynecologic cancer by encouraging research and disseminating knowledge. Our overall effort is focused on raising the standards of practice in the prevention and treatment of gynecologic malignancies through cooperation with other organizations who share our

interest in oncology and related fields. SGO's members make our Society the leading organization of gynecologic oncologists in the United States.

At the outset, I want to clearly state my belief that Congress can take action, that in the immediate future, will save the lives of thousands of women. Today, in the United States, one woman will be diagnosed with a gynecologic cancer every seven minutes. That's over 200 women just today, and close to 80,000 women this year. If detected early, a majority of these cancers can be cured. But frankly, many women don't know what symptoms to worry about, and therefore they are unable to ask the right questions of their health care providers. We all may have occasional bloating, abdominal or low back pain or constipation. But it's the persistent and progressive symptoms – for as little as two weeks – that should cause a woman to see her physician and ask about gynecologic cancer.

With the help of the federal government, we can make this happen. I would like to bring to your attention H. R. 1245, the Gynecologic Cancer Education and Awareness Act of 2005 – commonly referred to as “Johanna's Law.” This legislation would serve to increase education and awareness about the early warning signs for gynecologic cancers. That is the purpose of “Johanna's Law”—so no woman has to face a diagnosis of a gynecologic cancer because she did not know the associated symptoms, risks, or where to turn.

As a clinician and surgeon, I could sit here and recount hundreds of first person stories of women who came into my care too late, because they did not recognize the warning signs

their bodies were sending to alert them to the presence of cancer. These anecdotes, however, are validated by a recent poll of 800 women conducted by Research!America in conjunction with the Gynecologic Cancer Foundation. This poll surveyed women about their knowledge of gynecologic cancers, and is submitted as part of my testimony.

Here are just a few of the astonishing statistics:

- 47 percent of women surveyed could not name one symptom of gynecologic cancers, not one!
- 45 percent of women surveyed were not aware of any personal risk factors that increased their chance of developing a gynecologic cancer.
- Almost 60 percent of women surveyed could not name one step they could take to decrease their personal risk of developing a gynecologic cancer.

Mr. Chairman, statistics don't lie. We need to make a difference and we need to make it now. We've achieved much, but women are still dying. Congress' commitment to expanding the boundaries of medical research has been a vital weapon in our war against gynecologic cancer. For that we are grateful. However, there is still a tremendous gap between the science and the realities of clinical care. All of our scientific advances are useless if women do not know when, where and how to access care.

Representatives Issa, Levin, Granger and DeLauro have introduced Johanna's Law, which is co-sponsored by many members of this committee. In fact, there are 220 co-sponsors of this important * legislation. Under Johanna's Law, the Department of Health and Human Services would conduct public education and awareness programs to get

facts about the early warning signs of gynecologic cancers into the hands of the women of this country. I cannot over-stress the importance of arming women with basic facts about gynecologic cancers. Education is our front line defense in the battle against these killers of women. Your support will make this education and awareness possible.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am constantly inspired and humbled by the strength and determination of women to live. I believe your leadership on this issue will give even more women the full lives they so richly deserve. Thank you.

4:38 minutes