In 2015, an estimated 21,000 American women will be diagnosed with ovarian cancer and over 14,000 women will die from the disease. Ovarian cancer ranks fifth in cancer deaths among women, mainly because symptoms often go unnoticed in the early stages of the disease, and therefore most women are not diagnosed until the advanced stages when treatment is less effective and chances of survival are low.

An experimental cancer vaccine known as Vigil (formerly known as FANG) may slow advanced ovarian cancer, according to a new preliminary study. The results of the study were presented this past Saturday at the Society of Gynecologic Oncology (SGO) Annual Meeting on Women's Cancer by Dr. Jonathan Oh, MD, a gynecologic oncologist at Texas Oncology.

The phase II study included 31 women with either stage III or stage IV ovarian cancer. Eleven women were randomly assigned to standard treatment (surgery and chemotherapy). The other twenty women went through standard treatment while also receiving monthly injections of the Vigil vaccine. For the women who did not receive the vaccine, the cancer returned in a median of 14.5 months. Most of the women who received the vaccine went well beyond 14.5 months without recurrence, and the group had yet to reach the median time for the cancer to return when the trial ended.

The trial is reportedly moving on to phase III, which will include almost 400 women.

Results in phase II ovarian cancer suggest Vigil-mediated prolongation of time to recurrence, Dr. Oh said [1].
ACSH S Dr. Gil Ross added, The dire prognosis of advanced ovarian cancer makes any reasonable experimental design worthy of consideration. This elegant approach seems to have paid off in its early stages, yielding hope for some improvement in at least medium-term survival for these formerly hopeless women. Along with our other recent story of improved survival in the worst form of brain cancer [2], we may hope for more such progress against cancer in the near future.