

## Glossary of Terms

### **Biopsy**

A procedure where a small sample of cells or tissue is removed and examined by a pathologist to check for disease, including cancer.

### **Colposcopy**

A procedure in which a lighted, magnifying instrument called a colposcope is used to closely examine the cervix, vagina, and vulva for abnormal areas.

### **DES (Diethylstilbestrol)**

A synthetic estrogen once prescribed to prevent miscarriage or preterm labor. In 1971 researchers reported a link between DES use during pregnancy and clear cell adenocarcinoma of the vagina in exposed daughters, and the FDA advised against DES use in pregnancy. Exposed daughters have higher risks for certain reproductive problems and some cancers.

### **Endometriosis**

When tissue similar to the uterine lining grows outside the uterus, often on the ovaries, fallopian tubes, or pelvic lining. It can cause pelvic pain, irregular bleeding, and sometimes infertility.

### **Excess estrogen**

Having more estrogen relative to progesterone can stimulate the uterine lining. Unopposed estrogen from obesity or some hormone therapies increases endometrial cancer risk. Irregular or heavy bleeding can be a sign and should be evaluated.

### **HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)**

A virus that weakens the immune system. Women with HIV have higher risk for cervical cancer and should follow enhanced cervical screening recommendations.

### **HPV (Human Papillomavirus)**

A very common virus spread through intimate skin-to-skin contact. High-risk types can cause cancers of the cervix, vulva, vagina, anus, and oropharynx. Vaccination helps prevent many of these cancers.

### **Immunotherapy**

Treatment that uses substances to stimulate or suppress the immune system to help the body fight cancer.

### **Lichen sclerosus**

A chronic vulvar skin condition that can cause thin, white patches with itching or pain. It is linked with a higher likelihood of differentiated VIN and squamous cell carcinoma of the vulva, so ongoing care is important.

### **Menopause**

When a woman has gone 12 months in a row without a period. In the U.S. the average age is about 52. Any bleeding after menopause should be checked.

### **Metastasis**

The process by which cancer cells spread from where they started to other parts of the body. Cancers that have spread are called metastatic.

**Oncologist**

A doctor who treats cancer. A gynecologic oncologist is a specialist with extra training in cancers of the female reproductive system.

**Pap test (Pap smear)**

A screening test that collects cells from the cervix to check for precancer or cancer. Often paired with HPV testing.

**PCOS (Polycystic Ovary Syndrome)**

A hormonal condition with irregular periods, signs of excess androgens, and sometimes ovarian cysts. PCOS can lead to endometrial hyperplasia and increases endometrial cancer risk.

**Pelvic exam**

A physical exam of the pelvic organs that may include inspection of the vulva, a speculum exam of the vagina and cervix, and a bimanual exam to feel the uterus and ovaries.

**Spotting**

Light vaginal bleeding outside of a regular period. Bleeding or spotting between periods is considered abnormal uterine bleeding and should be evaluated.

**Staging**

The process of determining how much cancer is in the body and whether it has spread. Staging helps guide treatment and ranges from earlier to more advanced disease.

**Survivorship**

Care and support focused on life after a cancer diagnosis, including physical, emotional, social, and practical needs during and after treatment.

**Targeted therapy**

Drugs that target specific proteins or gene changes that help cancer cells grow and spread. Often part of precision medicine.

**Ultrasound (pelvic or transvaginal)**

Imaging that uses sound waves to look at the uterus, ovaries, and other pelvic organs. It is commonly used to evaluate causes of abnormal bleeding.

**VIN (Vulvar Intraepithelial Neoplasia)**

Precancerous changes in vulvar skin cells. Abnormal cells are not yet cancer, but without treatment some cases can progress to vulvar cancer.

**Treatments for Gynecologic Cancers****Surgery**

Removes tumors or affected reproductive organs when possible. Often a first-line option.

**Radiation therapy**

Uses high doses of radiation to kill cancer cells or shrink tumors. Delivered externally or internally.

**Chemotherapy**

Drugs that travel through the bloodstream to kill cancer cells throughout the body.

**Hormone therapy**

Treatments that block or lower hormones that some cancers need to grow, such as estrogen in some endometrial cancers.

**Targeted therapy**

Medicines that act on specific molecular targets in cancer cells.

**Immunotherapy**

Helps the immune system recognize and attack cancer cells.

**Palliative or supportive care**

Specialized care to relieve symptoms and improve quality of life at any stage, alongside curative treatments.