

“It’s very easy in the face of uncertainty to imagine the worst. From the first moments of my diagnosis I chose to be positive.” – Alisha Thomson, ovarian cancer survivor

It’s easy to think of gynaecological cancer as a disease that affects older women. But the truth is, it can strike at any age. Alisha was 27, with the world at her feet. She had great friends and was training to become a psychiatrist. Everything was falling into place. Until her young life was shattered by a diagnosis of ovarian cancer.

Alisha’s story is shocking. But it shows the importance of the research done by the Australia New Zealand Gynaecological Oncology Group (ANZGOG), which WomenCan supports.

We urgently need to find more effective treatments for women like Alisha. **Will you help by giving a gift today so we can continue to fund clinical trials that will find answers and save lives?**



Alisha’s symptoms began with baffling abdominal pains. Standard tests showed nothing abnormal. So she put it down to stress and carried on with her busy life. But the pain got worse. As she said, “I thought I was going crazy and I didn’t want to whinge. I regret now that I wasn’t honest with myself about how bad it was.”

Then she started feeling nauseous and lost weight. She didn’t want to make a fuss, but eventually, she couldn’t ignore her symptoms any more. Her GP arranged more specific tests, including a transvaginal ultrasound and CT scan. As Alisha was preparing for a girls’ weekend away, the call she was dreading came: she needed to visit her GP immediately.

“There’s no easy way to deliver bad news, but my doctor was amazing. She was empathetic, she went through it all slowly and made me call my mum. I tried not to cry, but I did.”

Alisha had Stage 4, low grade, serous ovarian cancer, or LGSC. There were spots in her abdomen, lymph nodes and breasts, as well as fluid in her lungs. She soon learned LGSC is often diagnosed in younger women – some, like her, in their 20s.

Despite the overwhelming situation, Alisha decided to focus on the positives in her life. After 10 months of chemotherapy along with keyhole surgery to remove her ovaries, fallopian tubes and visible tumours, she was back at work. She even celebrated her 28th birthday by skydiving!

Alisha's great response to chemotherapy astonished her doctors. Her treatment plan is focussed on keeping her stable as long as possible. As Alisha said, "Life started getting back to normal, but I knew there would be a point where it would come to an end."

ANZGOG is searching for better treatments for LGSC

LGSC is a rare ovarian cancer that can affect much younger women. The term 'low-grade' makes it sound like it's not serious, but this form of cancer often develops resistance to chemotherapy. Treatment options are limited for most women and prognosis is poor.

ANZGOG member, Professor Anna DeFazio, is leading the way in researching LGSC and making exciting progress. Genetic and molecular changes that drive the cancer are being uncovered, which will help clinicians devise new, targeted treatments. To build on this momentum, we urgently need to back more clinical trials that can test these treatments and make them more widely available to women like Alisha, who desperately need our help.

Clinical trials are the only way we can develop better treatments that offer improved outcomes for women like Alisha. That's why I hope you'll lend your support to our vital research today, with a donation to WomenCan.

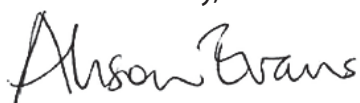
Eventually, Alisha had to stop work and start chemotherapy again. She decided to devote her time to raising funds for ANZGOG's cancer research and creating awareness in her local community. She's raised over \$25,000 to date and her great hope is that she will see improved treatments during her lifetime.

Alisha's advice for other women is to "listen to your body, trust your instincts and look after your health." She doesn't know what the future holds, but she doesn't put off the things that are important to her any more, like travel and spending time with the people she loves. In late 2018, Alisha drove around the South Island of New Zealand by herself – a trip she never would have contemplated without her diagnosis. She says having cancer has made her feel stronger.

Women like Alisha are truly inspiring and our researchers and clinicians are determined to continue searching for better answers for them. **Innovative clinical trials like ours push us closer towards understanding what drives their diseases and discovering safer, more effective ways to treat them. Just \$1,500 will put one woman on a clinical trial.**

Whether you pledge a regular donation every month – or make a one-off donation today – you'll be helping so many women like Alisha improve their quality of life. **I hope you can support us.**

Yours sincerely,



Alison Evans
Chief Executive Officer | ANZGOG

P.S. In wonderful news, Alisha's last test has cleared her of cancer. I hope you can help us today to do the research that will give more women like Alisha the news they are hoping for. A donation to WomenCan today will make a real difference.

