

The Edmée Firth Fund for Research in Ovarian Cancer

2025 – 2026 Progress Report

On behalf of Ovarian Cancer Research Alliance, thank you for your continued support of our mission. Your commitment to accelerating innovative ovarian cancer research continues to have a meaningful impact on the scientific community and on women facing this disease. EFFROC supports a balanced portfolio of research spanning early detection, translational science, and clinical innovation. During this reporting period, EFFROC-supported research achieved several important milestones:

- Successful completion of a pioneering early detection research project led by Dr. Daniel Heller (Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center).
- Advancement of Dr. Kristopher Sarosiek's (Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health) discoveries into an active clinical trial for recurrent ovarian cancer.
- Launch of a new early detection initiative led by Dr. Areej Alsaafin (Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center) focused on understanding the earliest origins of ovarian cancer.
- Support of a first-in-human cellular immunotherapy clinical trial led by Dr. Emese Zsiros (Roswell Park Cancer Center) aimed at improving outcomes for women with recurrent disease.

Together, these accomplishments demonstrate the impact of EFFROC's investment in ovarian cancer research. The following highlights provide an overview of the projects supported by EFFROC during the 2025-2026 reporting period and the progress made possible through your generosity.

Completed Research Project

Daniel Heller, PhD

Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

Perception-Based Detection of an Ovarian Cancer Disease Fingerprint

EFFROC Support: \$150,000

Grant completed: December 2025

Dr. Daniel Heller and his team successfully completed their research project focused on developing an innovative blood-based approach for ovarian cancer detection using nanosensor technology combined with artificial intelligence. This research sought to identify unique molecular "fingerprints" associated with ovarian cancer that could ultimately lead to earlier and more accurate diagnosis.

Research Outcomes

Dr. Heller's team developed a large library of highly sensitive nanosensors capable of detecting subtle disease-related changes in blood samples. The researchers demonstrated that these sensors can distinguish ovarian cancer from other gynecologic conditions and identify specific proteins associated with ovarian cancer

that may serve as future biomarkers. Although additional early-stage patient samples are needed before a clinical screening tool can be fully validated, the findings established an important foundation for the development of more accurate blood-based diagnostic tools.

Continuing Research Project

Kristopher Sarosiek, PhD
Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health
Targeting Apoptotic Vulnerabilities in Ovarian Cancer
EFFROC Support: \$50,000
Grant extended through December 2026

During the past year, Dr. Sarosiek and his collaborators made substantial progress toward developing a new treatment strategy for recurrent ovarian cancer. Based on the strength of the progress and the successful launch of a related clinical trial, OCRA approved a no-cost extension through December 2026 to allow for completion of the project.

Progress Update

Dr. Sarosiek's team discovered a promising new way to make ovarian cancer cells more vulnerable to treatment. By combining the chemotherapy drug paclitaxel with a novel therapy that targets a key cancer protein known as BCL-XL, researchers achieved dramatic tumor regressions in multiple laboratory models of ovarian cancer. Most importantly, the work has already advanced into a Phase 1b clinical trial for women with recurrent, treatment-resistant ovarian cancer, with the first patients enrolled in 2025.

New EFFROC-funded Research Initiatives for 2026

In 2026, EFFROC continued its commitment to advancing innovative ovarian cancer research by supporting two new OCRA-funded projects that address critical unmet needs in ovarian cancer detection and treatment.

Emese Zsiros, MD, PhD
Roswell Park Cancer Institute
First-in-Human Folate Receptor Alpha-Targeted BiTE-Secreting T Cells Ovarian Cancer Clinical Trial
EFFROC Support: \$100,000 in 2026
Three-Year Collaborative Research Development Grant (\$300,000 per year)
Grant period: January 2026 – December 2028

EFFROC provided \$100,000 toward the first year of this three-year, \$900,000 grant and has pledged an additional \$100,000 annually in both 2027 and 2028 to support the continuation of this innovative clinical research effort.

Project Overview

Most women with advanced ovarian cancer eventually experience recurrence after standard treatment, highlighting the need for new therapeutic options. Dr. Zsiros and her team are launching a first-in-human clinical trial evaluating a novel immunotherapy that modifies a patient's own T cells to recognize and attack ovarian cancer cells. If successful, this approach could provide a powerful new treatment option for women with recurrent ovarian cancer while helping researchers better understand which patients are most likely to benefit from advanced cellular immunotherapies.

Areej Alsaafin, PhD

Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

Decoding the Early Immune and Genomic Alterations Driving HGSC Initiation

EFFROC Support: \$100,000

Grant period: March 2026 – February 2028

EFFROC provided \$100,000 to fully fund this two-year Mentored Investigator Grant.

Project Overview

High-grade serous ovarian cancer (HGSC), the most common and deadly form of ovarian cancer, is believed to originate in the fallopian tubes years before symptoms appear. Dr. Alsaafin will use advanced artificial intelligence, genomic analysis, and spatial biology technologies to study the earliest biological changes that occur before cancer develops. By identifying the earliest warning signs of disease progression, this research could ultimately lead to earlier detection strategies and new opportunities for prevention in women at elevated risk.

Collectively, these projects illustrate the breadth of EFFROC's impact on ovarian cancer research. By supporting both established investigators and emerging scientific leaders, EFFROC is helping to expand scientific understanding, advance new therapeutic strategies, and improve prospects for earlier diagnosis.

Through its continued partnership with OCRA, EFFROC is contributing to progress across the entire research continuum—from fundamental discovery to clinical translation. We are grateful to EFFROC and its supporters for their enduring commitment to improving outcomes for women and families affected by ovarian cancer.