Singapore Team Studies Gastric Cancer Epidemiology and Offers New Treatment for Early Stage Gastric Cancer

1st Asia-Pacific Gastric Cancer Conference in Singapore 20-22 November 2006

A team from the National University Hospital (NUH) and Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore (YLLSoM, NUS) published a study on early diagnosis and screening of gastric cancer (also known as stomach cancer) in Singapore.

Using an economic model, the study showed that if there were targeted screening of 200,000 high-risk subjects (ethnic Chinese, male and age > 50), there is a potential benefit of preventing 743 gastric cancer deaths with cost benefit of about S$40,000 per Quality-adjusted Life Year.

The survival rate is much higher for patients who were detected early, hence the challenge is to increase the number of patients who are diagnosed early. In the early stage of gastric cancer, a patient often does not present any symptoms, making early diagnosis difficult. In many cases, the cancer has usually advanced when a diagnosis is made. In NUH, 60% of gastric cancer patients were diagnosed at stages 3 and 4.

Early detection of gastric cancer increases the survival rates:

- Stage 1: >85%
- Stage 2: 65%
- Stages 3 & 4: 20%

Based on the findings and research funding from Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR), the team has embarked on another study, “Gastric Cancer, Epidemiology, Clinical and Genetics Program” in 2004 with the aim to study 2,000 high-risk patients over a 5-year period. Through this, the team seeks to develop a cost-effective screening tool and eventually a diagnostic kit that can detect gastric cancer in its early stage. Of the 500 patients screened to date, 2 patients who showed no symptoms were detected with early gastric cancer.

New Endoscopic Treatment for Early Stage Gastric Cancer

The traditional treatment for gastric cancer is surgery (also known as gastrectomy). A new treatment, Endoscopic Submucosal Dissection (ESD) developed and first used in Japan in 2000 and widely popular in 2005, is now available in Singapore. Currently performed only in NUH, the treatment involves the use of an endoscopic knife to remove the cancer from the inner lining of the stomach, without surgery.
Until recently, the usage of endoscopic methods has been limited as they could only be used for very small cancers with size <1cm. With ESD, removal of large size superficial tumor of up to 5-6cm is now possible.

1st Asia-Pacific Gastric Cancer Conference

Both the study and new treatment method will be presented at the 1st Asia Pacific Gastric Cancer Conference, which is organized by the Department of Surgery, NUH and YLLSoM, NUS on 20-22 Nov 2006 in Singapore. The Conference aims to provide a platform for clinicians and scientists in this region to exchange experiences and ideas in the management of this global disease.

Many of the speakers are leading experts in this field worldwide, including Professor Jaffer Ajani from MD Anderson Cancer Center, Dr Takeshi Sano and Dr Takuji Gotoda from the National Cancer Center, Tokyo. As such, the Conference serves as a good opportunity to promote collaborations between some of the most renowned medical centres overseas and locally. A wide range of topics on gastric cancer such as basic science, screening, surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy will be discussed.

A highlight is the teleconference which will be conducted among 4 countries, namely, Japan, Taiwan, Korea and Singapore. During this conference, a team of surgeons and endoscopists from the National Cancer Center Hospital, Japan will carry out live demonstrations and workshops on latest techniques of gastric cancer surgery and Endoscopic Submucosal Dissection in NUH. The live demonstrations will be transmitted from the NUH Main Operating Theatre (Main OT) to the CRC Auditorium via broadband technology.

Public Forum

In conjunction with the 1st Asia-Pacific Gastric Cancer Conference, NUH together with the Singapore Cancer Society will be organising a public forum on 'Understanding The Nature of Gastric Cancer' on 25 Nov 06. Speakers from NUH will cover topics on prevention and early detection of gastric cancer as well as post gastric cancer surgery care and rehabilitation.

Date: 25 November 06, Saturday
Time: 1.00pm - 5.30pm
(English - 1pm - 3pm; Mandarin - 3.30pm - 5.30pm)
Venue: Kallang Community Club

Admission is free. For registration and enquiries, please call the Singapore Cancer Society at 6421 5838.

Background Information - Prevalence of Gastric Cancer

Gastric cancer is the fourth most common cancer in the world and second leading cause of cancer death. There are reportedly 800,000 new cases annually and the rates in Asia remain the highest.
Locally, it is one of the most common cancers in Singapore. More than 600 new cases of gastric cancer are diagnosed every year. Local numbers show that it is the fourth most common cancer in males and sixth most common among females (Singapore Cancer Registry Report No.6, 1968 – 2002). In view of the world and Singapore’s growing ageing population, the numbers of death from gastric cancer can be expected to increase significantly over the next few decades.

About National University Hospital

The National University Hospital (NUH) opened its doors to the public on 24 June 1985 as the first restructured hospital in Singapore. As the nation’s only university hospital, NUH remains dedicated to caring for patients, providing excellent medical education and leading medical research.

Since its inception, it has grown to become 935-bed, acute-care, tertiary hospital. NUH is committed to improving the standard of their medical, paramedical and nursing care as well as constantly striving to provide personalized, specialized, cost-effective and specialized patient care.

With 22 clinical, 3 dental and 6 paramedical departments, as well as numerous specialist outpatient clinics and specialised service centres, NUH has a comprehensive range of services to meet the growing needs of patients. NUH also has a pool of more than 3500 professional staff providing round-the-clock personalised care to patients.

In recognition of its ongoing commitment to provide high standard of care, NUH is the first hospital to be granted accreditation from the Joint Commission International in August 2004 and the Singapore Service Class in July 2004.


Media Contact:

Lisa Ang  
Senior Executive, Media Relations  
Corporate Communications & Services  
National University Hospital  
DID: 6772 5117  HP: 9665 2192  
EMAIL: lisa_ang@nuh.com.sg