

NUH offers safer prostate cancer check

It is the first S-E Asian hospital to offer a low-risk biopsy done using local anaesthesia

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A Singapore hospital is pioneering what it says is a safer method of detecting prostate cancer.

The National University Hospital (NUH) learnt the technique in Hong Kong and started offering it in October, becoming the first hospital in South-east Asia to do so.

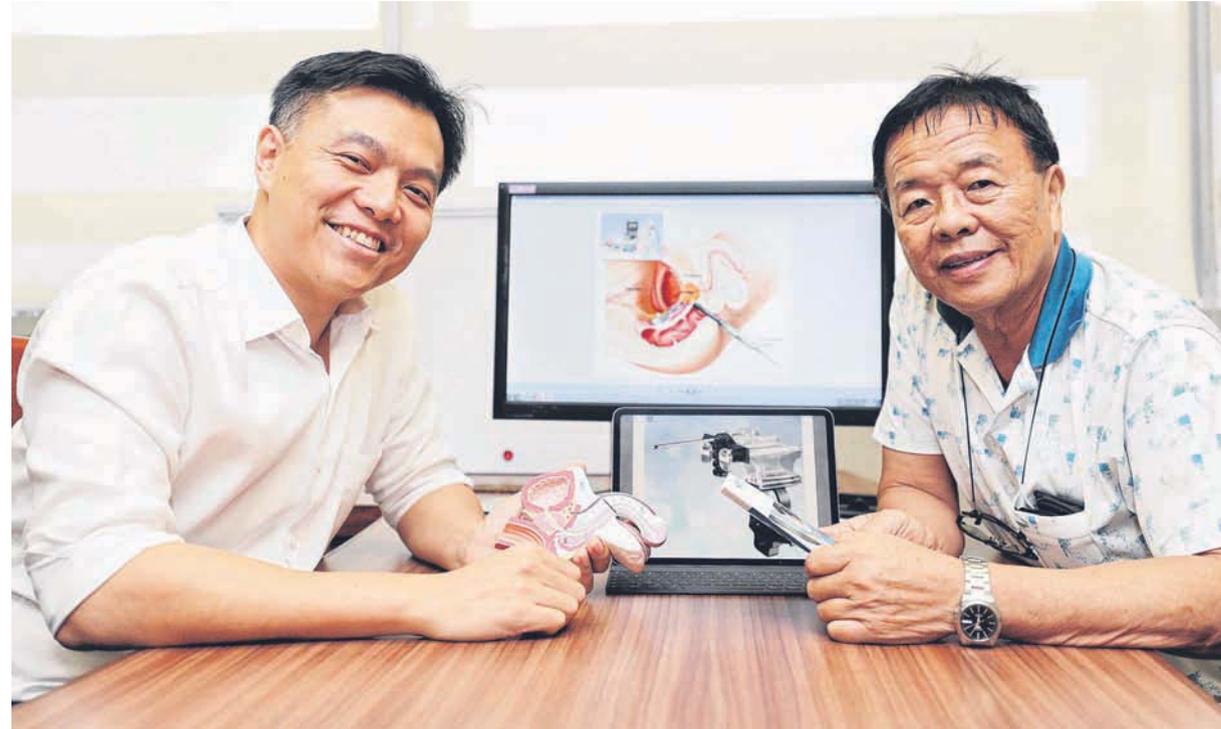
Known as the transperineal prostate biopsy, it involves passing a needle through the perineum – which is located between the scrotum and anus – to take samples of prostate tissue.

The procedure was previously only done using general anaesthesia, but can now be carried out with local anaesthesia.

The transperineal prostate biopsy has three distinct advantages compared with the standard transrectal prostate biopsy, according to Dr Lincoln Tan, NUH's director of urologic oncology.

Firstly, it has an almost zero risk of serious infection, unlike the transrectal method which carries a 3 per cent risk.

This is because with the transperineal method, the needle passes through the perineum.



Dr Lincoln Tan (left), NUH's director of urologic oncology, with Mr Tan Ai Poh, a patient who had the transperineal prostate biopsy carried out last month with local anaesthesia and has been given the all-clear. ST PHOTO: JONATHAN CHOO

For the transrectal method, bacteria may enter the bloodstream because the needle passes through the rectum. In addition, the transperineal method does not cause any bleeding of the rectum, whereas there is a bleeding risk of 10 per cent to 40 per cent for the transrectal method, Dr Tan added.

Lastly, the front part of the prostate is less accessible via the rectum and is more easily reached through the perineum.

Currently, the standard biopsy is the transrectal prostate biopsy, but with the transperineal prostate biopsy with local anaesthesia now available, NUH plans to offer the

transperineal biopsy as the first option for patients, said Dr Tan.

The transperineal biopsy performed using local anaesthesia costs about \$2,200 at NUH before subsidies, which is comparable to the transrectal biopsy. Both procedures can be carried out at the clinic.

In comparison, the transperineal biopsy performed using general anaesthesia is more than double the cost – at about \$5,000 before subsidies – because patients need to stay in the hospital, usually for a day, and the procedure is carried out in an operating theatre.

About 300 prostate biopsies are done at the hospital every year.

Dr Tan hopes that with the new option, more patients will be encouraged to go for biopsies and the cancer can be detected earlier.

Currently, one in four men here get their prostate cancer detected at Stage 4. Prostate cancer is the third-most common cancer among men in Singapore.

It accounted for 13 per cent of cancer diagnoses among men from 2011 to 2015, or 4,053 cases, statistics from the Singapore Cancer Registry Annual Registry Report 2015 show. Of this number, 795 died from the cancer. The incidence of prostate cancer jumped five times during the period from 1976 to 2015 – from six to 30 per 100,000 men.

Mr Tan Ai Poh, 69, is one of around 10 patients who have undergone the transperineal prostate biopsy under local anaesthesia.

"I felt a lot safer doing this procedure," said the supervisor, whose biopsy last month gave him the all-clear.

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300

Number of prostate biopsies done at the National University Hospital annually.

1 in 4

Number of men here with prostate cancer who are diagnosed at Stage 4.

13%

Percentage of cancer diagnoses among men that prostate cancer accounted for from 2011 to 2015.