

Prevent Thalassaemia: test before you get married

PROF WAQARA KHAN

Thalassaemia is an inherited disease affecting the blood. Although it is the most common congenital disorder in the world including Bangladesh, people know very few about the disease. The abnormal gene that is responsible for Thalassaemia is passed on to the patients from their parents or grandparents. It only occurs when both father and mother carry the abnormal gene and transmit to their child. There is 25% chance of a child suffering from Thalassaemia in such case. However, if any of the two partners is a carrier of abnormal gene and other one is normal, there is no chance of occurring Thalassaemia. Thus, there is scope of prevention of this disease by awareness of people and testing for the disease before marriage. The carrier status of Thalassaemia trait is about 10% in Bangladesh. It means there are approximately 16 million carriers, but presumably less than 1% of the population is aware of this disorder. In Thalassaemia, there is defect in the production of red pigment of blood called haemoglobin that carries oxygen to our tissue. This leads to a condition called anaemia



PHOTO: BTF/DAVID BARIKDER

A thalassaemic child is getting blood transfusion at Bangladesh Thalassaemia Foundation (BTF) Hospital.

characterised by weakness, fatigue, feeling faint, shortness of breath and growth failure. In order to correct anaemia, regular blood transfusion is needed to keep hemoglobin up to normal level. But there is risk in transfusion too. It results in excessive collection of iron in the body and which is toxic causing damage to the heart, liver, pancreas and pituitary gland leading to organ failure. This iron

needs to be removed by drugs which are expensive. The treatment is lifelong. Bone marrow transplantation is the only cure; but it is very costly and has complications as well. Thus, prevention is always the best strategy. Awareness, screening of carriers and prenatal diagnosis of couples are important steps in preventing the births of Thalassaemia. We can take inspiration from Cyprus that

showed awareness can completely eradicate the disease. In early 1970, Cyprus with one of the highest rate of carriers of Thalassaemia started a programme of awareness and screening. But it failed to reduce the births of thalassaemic children as there was no facilities for prenatal diagnosis. Then they made it available and the births of thalassaemic children had drastically fallen.

At present, several countries like Italy, Greece, UK, France, Iran, Thailand, Singapore and Hong Kong have started comprehensive national prevention programme which include education, screening of carriers and counselling as well as providing with information on prenatal diagnosis. Our government should make better facilities to treat the patients and ultimately prevent the disease. About seven to eight thousand children are born with Thalassaemia every year in Bangladesh and suffer till their early death. The irony is we could prevent those births and the agony of children and their families. The following steps need to be taken in order to make Bangladesh free from Thalassaemia.

- All government laboratories should have facilities to diagnose the disease and detect traits.
- Awareness of the disease and screening of carriers along with prenatal diagnosis of the foetus should be started with the option of abortion of the affected child.

The writer is the President, Dhaka Shishu Hospital Thalassaemia Center. E-mail: waqarkind@gmail.com

HEALTH TIPS

Sweating excessively: know the causes

During summer, sweating is a common physiological phenomenon but there are certain other reasons behind it. If it feels like you are frequently perspiring for no apparent reason, it may time for a visit to the doctor. The Cleveland Clinic explains these possible causes of excessive sweating:

- Heat or stress.
- Recent physical activity.
- Hormonal changes.
- Infection.
- Metabolic disorder.
- Certain prescription drugs.

Here are some tips to deal with heavy sweating.

- Use higher-strength deodorants and antiperspirants
- Choose lightweight, breathable fabrics, such as cottons
- Use powders meant for the feet to keep foot moisture and sweat at a minimum



HEALTH bulletin

Heat waves could worsen COPD symptoms

As air temperatures rise, so too may the symptoms of the chronic respiratory illness called COPD which is characterised by chronic cough — a new study suggests according to a study presented Diego at the annual meeting of the American Thoracic Society. With these findings, researchers identified the need for adaptive approaches to COPD treatment to prevent adverse health effects related to increases in temperature. Warmer temperatures outside were also linked to an increase in COPD symptoms.

Diabetes may be bigger threat to the female heart

Diabetes appears to pose a greater risk to heart health for women than men, according to a new study in the journal Diabetologia. Researchers said that the risk of coronary heart disease conferred by diabetes is between 40-50% greater for women than for men.



A blend of quality care and medical technology

TAMANNA KHAN, back from Singapore

Advanced medical technologies can be bought or copied. But ensuring the best quality healthcare providers to the patients, is where the challenge lies. Overcoming these challenges, very few hospitals in Asia have been able to stand as a model of comprehensive and quality healthcare. Gleneagles Hospital, Singapore claims to be one of those which has set its standard to a new level. It has become the destination for a large number of patients from Asia and also other parts of the world. In order to reveal its achievement and inform about the latest addition in its advanced medical technology, the hospital has recently organised its 16th Annual Seminar. Dr Vincent Chia, Chief Executive Officer of Gleneagles said, "The regional hospitals can compete with us in terms of technology and equipment but expertise is much more important." Referring to the world renowned specialists, Gleneagles has areas such as women's health, orthopaedics and lung cancer. He said, "Our doctors would make only a little cut and take out the whole pancreatic tumour. The skill is very important in these cases." In fact, it is Gleneagles' expert team of physicians that attracts patients not only from Singapore but from countries even as far as that of the United States and the United



PHOTO: GLENEAGLES HOSPITAL

Kingdom. "For international patients, Gleneagles provides same quality of healthcare as found in developed countries but at a cheaper cost," explained Steven Mok, a senior marketing manager of the hospital. About 20 percent of Gleneagles' patients come from Indonesia, Myanmar, Bangladesh and even India, he informed. Parkway Asian Transplant Unit in the hospital is the Asia's leading centre for liver diseases and liver transplantations. Jointly managed by Gleneagles and Asian American Liver Centre, it is also the most active living donor liver transplantation unit in Southeast Asia, the floor is designed in such a way that post-surgery patients can receive close

monitoring and comprehensive care by Gleneagles' team of specialised, multi-disciplinary doctors, nurses and allied healthcare professionals round the clock. The hospital not only treats patients but also make people aware on how to prevent diseases. A distinct feature among Gleneagles doctors is that they try to suggest minimum intervention into the body to treat a problem, rather emphasise on prevention techniques. According to Urogynaecologist Dr Christopher Chong the first surgery is the most important surgery, since with each subsequent one the body gets more and more affected.

E-mail: khantama@gmail.com

Health News

Improving access to quality iodised salt

STAR HEALTH DESK

The Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC), with the financial and technical support of the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), organised a day-long national workshop on improving access to quality iodised salt in Bangladesh, says a press release. With the active involvement of the government and industry partners, the workshop was aimed to build a shared understanding and consensus on quality assurance and quality control measures, identify better delivery models and create an enabling environment for salt mill owners and consumers.

Initiative to stop dowry and early marriage

STAR HEALTH DESK

The two major reasons behind violence against women and children in Bangladesh refer to dowry and child marriage. Keeping these in response, SERAC-Bangladesh with the support from a leading advocacy organisation for ensuring women's rights, *Women Deliver* started a project named 'Social rising for dowry and early marriage prevention (Jagoroni)', according to a press release. The project is aimed at increasing social awareness, empowering people with more information on law and improving communication to convince people to stand against this social menace.



Knowing for better living

Studies show that walking at least **two hours** a week reduced the incidence of premature death from cardiovascular disease by about **50% !**

Exercise regularly

Maintain a healthy diet

Control your body weight

Avoid smoking

Control your diabetes

Consult your Doctor



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