

**HEALTHCARE SERVICES**

# Tech boom to reshape cancer treatment in Asia

KOWSHER JAHAN KHALED, back from Singapore

CANCER treatment has never been so easy and effective. Around 100 healthcare industry leaders and practitioners from the USA, Canada and Asia gathered at an international symposium in Singapore on November 21 to share their experience on a breakthrough in cancer treatment: minimally-invasive surgery.

The symposium -- minimally-invasive oncology: state-of-the-art -- was co-organised by Gleneagles Hospital, Singapore; University of Pittsburgh Medical Centre (UPMC), and Asian American Medical Group (AAMG).

In a minimally-invasive surgical procedure, surgeons use a variety of operating techniques that cause less injury to the body than open surgery. This is generally safer than open surgery, allowing patients to recover faster and with less pain and scarring. Minimally-invasive surgery is usually done on an outpatient basis or requires only a short hospital stay.

Dr Tan Kai Chah, executive chairman of Singapore-based AAMG, chaired the symposium's first session, titled "minimally-invasive hepatopancreatobiliary (HPB) surgery", which explored the techniques and outcomes of minimally-invasive surgery for the liver, pancreas and biliary system.

Speakers for the session were Dr Cheah Yee Lee, a surgeon of Asian American Liver Centre, and Dr Melissa E Hogg, assistant professor of the gastrointestinal surgical oncology division at the University of Pittsburgh, who discussed liver and pancreatic resections, respectively.

The afternoon session, which was on "precision radiotherapy in the oncology clinic", was chaired by Dr Khoo Kei Siong, deputy medical director and senior consultant at Parkway Cancer Centre. In the session, regional experts from Singapore's top medical institutions shaped the dialogue on radiation oncology in cancer treatment.

"Minimally-invasive surgery has become a positive disruptive force in medicine over recent years. It is truly fascinating how technology has enriched the possibilities in the minimally-invasive treatments and surgeries," Dr Tan said at the symposium at Gleneagles Hospital.

Technological advancements have redefined HPB surgical services, leading to an improvement in patients' experiences, he added. "This means smaller incisions, less



*"We remain open to exploring meaningful collaborations with healthcare providers in Asia," says Dr Vincent Chia, CEO of Gleneagles Hospital, Singapore*



Tan Kai Chah



Charles E Bogosta

discomfort, faster recovery and shorter hospital stays."

Radiotherapy has been a critical part of cancer treatment over the past 20 years. AAMG established the Asian American Radiation Oncology this year to provide specialised radiation therapy and cancer treatment, as well as management and advisory services, to radiation oncology units in Asia, Tan said.

"Minimally-invasive surgery is on the rise at our hospital," said Dr Vincent Chia, chief

executive officer of Gleneagles Hospital, Singapore.

The experience of the specialists at the hospital -- many of whom were trained at renowned healthcare providers -- contributes to good clinical outcomes from the use of minimally-invasive surgery in their procedures across disciplines, he said.

Gleneagles Hospital houses more than 300 on-site doctors from over 30 specialties and sub-specialties, including oncology, cardiology, general surgery, gastroenterology and

orthopaedic surgery.

On potential collaborations with Bangladeshi hospitals, Dr Chia said: "Although it is not in our plans in the near future, we remain open to exploring meaningful collaborations with other healthcare providers or individual medical practitioners across the world -- especially within the Asian region -- in the areas of medical education, such as exchange of knowledge and skills training."

On an ad hoc basis, Gleneagles Hospital

and/or the specialist clinics which it houses receive individual requests from doctors or hospitals across the world for short periods of internship or observership, he added.

"We will continue to consider such requests, as well as proposals on possible collaborations from interested medical practitioners, in line with our commitment of continuing medical education and fostering good relations with our regional peers," Chia told The Daily Star after the symposium.

Programmes such as short-term doctors' attachments or observerships can facilitate exchange of ideas, skills and knowledge, he said. Other possible methods include discussions of case studies, joint video calls and participation in medical symposiums or seminars.

Collaboration with industry partners may also be a platform for exchange of knowledge, subject to local and international regulations, he said.

Charles E Bogosta, president of UPMC International, said that UPMC, as a global healthcare provider, is keen on collaborating with respected medical practitioners from around the world.

"Through this symposium, we hope to explore cutting-edge technologies and clinical treatments to assist the healthcare industry in battling liver and pancreatic diseases," Bogosta said.

The USA-based UPMC, a US\$12-billion healthcare provider and the largest non-governmental employer in Pennsylvania, integrates more than 60,000 employees, 20 hospitals, and more than 500 doctors' offices and outpatient sites.

In a presentation, Dr Cheah Yee Lee of Asian American Liver Centre discussed the current indications and outcomes of laparoscopic liver resection.

The use of minimally-invasive techniques in liver resection for benign and malignant disorders has been increasing in specialised centres, with advances in surgical technology and operative techniques, Cheah said.

While the benefits of the laparoscopic approach are obvious, minimally-invasive techniques should be proven to provide equivalent oncological outcomes, post-operative mortality and morbidity rates compared to open liver resection, she added.

Gleneagles Hospital, which is operated by Parkway Hospitals Singapore, has a patient assistance centre at Gulshan in Dhaka.



A Yahoo! sign is seen in front of its headquarters in Sunnyvale, California.

## Yahoo board in final talks on future of company

REUTERS, San Francisco

YAHOO Inc's board of directors on Friday was in the third and final day of meetings that could decide the future of one of Silicon Valley's most prominent but troubled companies.

One option on the table for the nine board members is whether to sell Yahoo's core business, which includes Mail, its sports sites, and advertising technology.

The company is also in the process of deciding whether to continue with the spinoff of its \$30 billion stake in Chinese e-commerce company Alibaba Group Holdings Ltd.

SunTrust analyst Robert Peck said the board might hold off on any decision because of the complexity of some of the options.

"While many investors may simply apply a mid single-digit EBITDA multiple to value the core, we believe the value is more intricate," he wrote, referring to earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization.

According to tech news site Re/Code, Yahoo's board finished its meetings without a decision on the Alibaba spinoff. The site said a decision, which could include halting, delaying or continuing with the spinoff, was expected by the end of the weekend, citing sources.

Calls to sell the core business increased last month when activist investor

Starboard Value LP requested the move to avoid potential tax penalties associated with a spinoff of Alibaba.

In January, Chief Executive Officer Marissa Mayer announced the plan to spin off the Alibaba stake into an independent business. Yahoo said the deal would be tax-free, but the U.S. Internal Revenue Service has declined to verify that.

Taxes related to the spinoff could leave Yahoo shareholders on the hook for \$12 billion.

Analysts who follow the company have said that private equity, media and Internet firms are potential buyers for Yahoo's core business.

The Alibaba stake dates back to 2005, when Yahoo paid \$1 billion for a 40 per cent slice of the company in a deal credited to the U.S. company's co-founder, Jerry Yang.

By 2012, the two companies struck a deal to sell more than half the stake back to Alibaba for \$6.3 billion in cash and \$800 million in preferred Alibaba Group shares.

The deal brought Yahoo shareholders \$3 billion and the company more than \$1 billion to support its core business. But it also spotlighted the fact that the bulk of the company's value came from Alibaba and a 35.5 per cent stake in Yahoo Japan Corp.

Yahoo's shares closed up 1.7 per cent at \$34.91 Friday.

## Pakistan should be more transparent on \$46b China deal, state bank head says

REUTERS, Karachi

PAKISTAN needs to be more transparent about the details of energy and infrastructure deals worth \$46 billion signed with China earlier this year, the governor of the State Bank of Pakistan told Reuters on Friday.

The deals, called the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, should help shore up Pakistan's crumbling infrastructure and reduce its electricity shortages by building more power plants.

China will get a free trade zone in Pakistan's Gwadar port and access to the Indian Ocean. New Pakistani roads will open up routes for Chinese goods into Europe and the Middle East.

But the details, terms and financing of many of the deals remain unclear.

"CPEC needs to be more transparent," Ashraf Mahmood Wathra said. "I don't know out of the \$46 billion how much is debt, how much is equity and how much is in kind."

Pakistan, a nuclear-armed nation of 190 million people, has frequently struggled to manage its cash flows because the government is reluctant to tax the wealthy and powerful.

In September of 2013, Pakistan faced a balance of payments crisis, with just over \$4 billion in foreign reserves held by the State Bank - less than a month of imports.

But since then, the state bank's reserves have recovered to \$14.6 billion, with the help of an International Monetary Fund program agreed after Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif took power in 2013, a \$1.5 billion gift from Saudi Arabia, an auction of telecommunications licenses and the issuing of a Euro bond.



Officials of China and Pakistan are signing a deal at a ceremony in Gwadar, Pakistan.

Inflation dropped 2.73 percent as oil prices in particular and commodity prices in general declined. The rupee has stabilised at 105 to the US dollar, although last month the IMF said it believes the rupee is over-valued.

Pakistan's economy grew 4.2 percent this year, a slight improvement over the last year, and the country hopes to reach 4.5 to 5.0 percent growth next year, Wathra said.

Yet underlying problems plaguing the economy, including daily power cuts and security

problems, remain.

"Our long-term solutions lie in increasing exports and increasing FDI (foreign direct investment)," Wathra said. "Without these two strong inflows, it is very difficult to keep the economy on track."

Foreign investment flows have been shrinking, falling by nearly a quarter this financial year compared with last year, and exporters say the energy crisis and an over-valued rupee is crippling business.

## World's first washable smartphone to debut in Japan

AFP, Tokyo

Tired of those unsightly smudges and other dirt on your bacteria-laden smartphone?

A Japanese firm says it has the solution with what it describes the world's first smartphone that can be washed with soap and water.

Waterproof smartphones have been on the market for a while. But telecom company KDDI says its new "Digno rafre" phone -- to be launched in Japan next week -- is the only one that can withstand a soapy bath.

"Our development team washed the smartphone more than 700 times to test its durability," a company spokesman told AFP. An online commercial aimed at proving its credentials features a child dropping the phone onto a plate of food topped with ketchup.

## China to halt stock trading for volatility from January

AFP, Shanghai

China will temporarily halt stock trading if the market moves five percent or more under a new system to take effect on January 1, the country's two exchanges said Friday, as authorities seek to curb volatility.

Plans for the mechanism -- dubbed a "circuit breaker" -- were first publicly revealed in September in the wake of a rout that wiped trillions of dollars off China's markets.

The Shanghai and Shenzhen markets will halt trading for 15 minutes if the CSI

300 index of 300 major listed companies rises or falls five percent, the exchanges said in separate statements. The rule cuts in half the originally proposed 30 minutes previously given in a draft plan that was open for public comment.

If the index -- which includes companies such as banking giant ICBC and energy majors PetroChina and Sinopec -- gains or loses seven percent, trading will be suspended for the rest of the day to avoid "extreme systemic risks", the Shanghai exchange said. The market regulator said the move aimed to maintain order.