

Dr Choo Su Pin enlightens on Gastrointestinal Cancers

Dr Choo Su Pin is a medical oncologist who subspecialises in gastrointestinal cancers, including colorectal, hepatobiliary, pancreatic, stomach, oesophageal, anal, and neuroendocrine cancers. She is also the Senior Consultant of Medical Oncology at Curie Oncology, Farrer Park Hospital, Singapore, a hospital which by now, is famous among the people of Bangladesh. Dr Choo was the Chief of Gastrointestinal Oncology department and Deputy Head of the Medical Oncology Division at National



Cancer Centre Singapore (NCCS), prior to private practice.

She recently visited Bangladesh, thanks to the International Medical Consultants (IMC), a unique healthcare assistance centre in Bangladesh. She was invited to the first ever 'Dhaka Cancer Summit 2019,' as one of the guest speakers to shine some light on gastrointestinal cancers. In her words, "I hope this cancer summit takes place every year, because it's about time we create more cancer awareness."

She also expressed her concern for lack of access to screening processes for early detection and prevention of cancers and social awareness in Bangladesh.

In an interview with Dr Choo Su Pin, she shared her views about lifestyle facts

related to gastrointestinal cancers, and about living a healthy life, exclusively for Star Lifestyle.

Can ulcers lead to stomach cancer?

Stomach ulcers may not lead to cancer. However, if it is formed as a result of inflammation caused by the bacteria H. pylori, then it increases the risks for stomach cancer. Then again, it just increases the chance of getting cancer, by a narrow margin. This does not necessarily mean that you will get it right away. In short, stomach ulcers can be treated, and chances of getting cancer is still not high.

When should gastric pain or gas attack be a matter of actual concern?

Gastric pain can happen for numerous reasons, and stomach cancer can be one of them. If the issue is resolved through medication, it should not be concerning. However, if the pain is persistent for a month, and does not go away with medication, then one should seek immediate medical treatment i.e. scopes may be used to find out what is going on.

In addition to gastric pain, other symptoms may include weight loss, loss of appetite, difficulty swallowing, and bloating, which are not good and could indicate underlying gastric cancer.

How is gastric or stomach cancer diagnosed and treated?

If stomach cancer is detected at early stages, it can be cured. Early detection is key. However, early stage stomach cancers often have no symptoms. Scopes may be an effective way for early detection in some patients.

Surgery is the curative treatment for gastric cancer, which is then followed by

chemotherapy to reduce the chances of it reappearing. After surgery, a patient undergoes chemotherapy for at least 6 months in hopes of increasing chance of cure, depending upon the patient's condition. But for advanced stages, we often use chemotherapy, and sometimes immunotherapy, to try and control the cancer.

Colon Cancer

Cancer always starts as a benign polyp in the colon. It takes about ten years for the benign polyp to become cancerous. So, if one can detect the polyp through a scope and treat it immediately, the patient will not develop cancer.

It is recommended that you go for a scope i.e. colonoscopy when you are 50 years old. If one has family history of colon cancer, you may need scopes at an earlier age. Prevention is better than cure, because by the time the symptoms arise, it may already be too late for treatment.

Rates of colon cancer are increasing at a rapid pace, despite being one of the most preventable types of cancer. Colon cancer highly depends upon one's lifestyle. Because of this, Bangladesh should have a screening process for colon cancer.

What are the dietary and lifestyle habits we should follow/avoid?

The best way to avoid cancer is to exercise regularly, and maintain a healthy balanced diet, consisting of more vegetables, and more complex carbohydrates. Preserved, processed, and smoked foods should be avoided.

By Tahmid Azad Sohan

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