

The matter of urologic diseases

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Dr Ho received his MBBS and Master of Medicine (Surgery) from the National University of Singapore.

He is trained as a robotic and minimally invasive cancer urologist. His fellowship in Europe was in the University of Innsbruck, Austria, under the tutelage of the late Professor Georg Bartsch. He was trained in robotic partial nephrectomy and robotic prostatectomy.

Additionally, he also did an endourology fellowship in Hamburg, Germany, with Professor Andreas Gross. He is trained in endoscopic management of stones disease and laser prostatectomy.

Recently, he was in Dhaka, and was able to share some of his thoughts on the current scenario of urological disorders.

What are the main types of illnesses and disorders associated with urology?

There are various types of kidney related problems — cancers, enlargement of the prostate, and clinical matters of the urinary bladder. There are the three major cancers that usually affect the uterine system, which comprises the kidney, the prostate, and the bladder.



There is also Benign Prostate Enlargement (BPH), which increases in males in every 10 years, starting from the age of 50. With each passage of 10 years, there is a 10 percent higher chance of being diagnosed with it.

When enough water is not consumed, stones form in the kidneys. This is another major concern for urologists.

What are the symptoms of these disorders and cancers?

A common symptom in all the urological cancers is the presence of blood in urine. There is flank pain, causing intrusive bank pain. Tumours spread and stretches on the kidney, making urination a painful experience.

Prostate cancer is common in men above 50, and symptoms include passing off urine. In cases of cancer in the urinary bladder,

symptoms include a burning sensation while passing urine.

In benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), there is dribbling at the end of urination, and inability to completely empty the bladder, causing pain.

With kidney stones, there is an irritation every now and then when wanting to urinate as the pathway has been thickened making it difficult to respond to the calls of nature.

What is the most common type of urologic cancer in Bangladesh?

Bladder cancer is the most common, due to excessive smoking. In other countries, it is prostate cancer.

What are the lifestyle and health choices that should be followed/avoided to tackle these problems?

Smoking should completely be stopped. It is a major cause of cancer, especially in the urinary bladder. One should visit a physician once any of the symptoms are detected. Men above 50 should go for PSA (Prostate Specific Antigen) screening to detect any trace of tumour caused by prostate cancer. Exercise in the streams of yoga and jogging should be a regular practice. One should also drink plenty of water.

What treatments are available for the urologic illnesses?

For kidney cancer, there is nephrectomy to remove the entire kidney, or the infected

parts. Cystectomy is carried out to remove the bladder when it comes to bladder cancer.

For prostate cancer, prostatectomy is carried out where a surgical removal of the whole prostate, or the infected part is removed. Radiotherapy is used in both bladder and prostate cancers.

For BPH, there is transurethral resection of the prostate (TURP), which widens the passage for the urine to flow smoothly. For kidney stones, extracorporeal shock wave lithotripsy (ESWL) is carried out using shockwaves to blast stones into pieces. Lasers are also available to break the stones in smaller pieces making them easy to get rid of.

A major improvement in treatments is the key hole operation using small robotic arms with a camera that makes quick and accurate cuts to detect and remove the tumours in sensitive areas such as kidneys, prostate, and bladder.

What are the current ongoing developments in urology?

The robotic arm surgery is a major stride in this field. Focal therapy, a non-invasive therapy to destroy tumours is being developed for prostate cancer, as radiotherapy is harmful.

By Israr Hasan
Photo: Courtesy

INTERVIEW

In conversation with Dr Radhika Lakshmanan

Star Lifestyle recently met with Dr Radhika Lakshmanan, the renowned oncological surgeon, and discussed matters related to the diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer.

How common is breast cancer in Bangladesh? What is the mindset of people as far as breast cancer is concerned?

Breast cancer is one of the most common forms of cancers. In Singapore, it is the most frequent cause of all cancer deaths. Whereas in Bangladesh, lung cancer is the leading cause of death in men, but in case of breast cancers, the figure doubles, resulting into the most common cancer and the most common cause of cancer related death among women. Moreover, the chances of getting breast cancer is higher than any other cancers during pregnancy.

I think, in Bangladesh, certain groups of people are still apprehensive of seeing a doctor. When they find a lump in the breast, or the breast looks abnormal, they are afraid to see a doctor thinking that they will cut off the breast.

They come in late when the situation becomes difficult to treat. What they do not know is when they come in late, the success rate of operation decreases down to less than 25 percent.

What are the main risk factors of breast cancer?

The general risk factors could be

categorised in two parts — one is lifestyle, and the other is inherent factor. One can barely do anything about inherent factors, for instance, age. The older one becomes, the greater the chance of getting cancers.

Secondly, a higher lifetime exposure to oestrogen may increase breast cancer risk. Risk increases if periods start at a young age, or if menopause occurs at a later age. Then, there are some women who take hormone replacement pills after menopause, which is a definite risk factor of breast cancer.

However, the risk factors arising through lifestyle, i.e. bad food habits, can be controlled easily. High cholesterol, or high sugar foods, excess alcohol, and smoking could be among the mainstreams of bad food habits. Mental stress and lack of physical exercise are also associated with cancer.

What are the surgical options for people suffering from breast cancer?

In light of standard breast cancer surgeries, lumpectomy refers to removing the tumour and some tissues around the growth, whereas mastectomy refers to removing the entire breast. If the tumour is large, or if it has spread, the former is not going to work, and the only option is to go for the complete removal of the affected breast.

SYMPTOMS AND EARLY DETECTIONS

Lumps can be the first signs of warning for breast cancer. When a woman finds a lump in the breast, they should first undergo self-



examination, which is encouraged at least once in a three-month period. In most of the cases, women avoid the lump as it does not cause any pain.

Secondly, if any fluid comes out of the nipples in the form of water or blood, one should go for detection.

Thirdly, if skin shows any changes due to dimpling of the breast, one should go for a mammography. Moreover, lump in the armpit could also be considered as one of the signs of breast cancer.

In addition, inverted nipples i.e. if it lies flat against the areola or goes inward instead of sticking out, then something can be wrong. Most women avoid worry about the changes in the shape of nipples

because it does not cause any pain at all.

TREATMENT

Early treatments can involve surgery, which is compulsory and cannot be dealt with medication alone. However, one can avoid chemotherapy if they are able to detect it early and undergo surgery. Another benefit of getting early treatment is one might not need mastectomy, and simply be done with a lumpectomy.

The treatment varies depending on the cells. Some might require chemotherapy, some might not, whereas some might need chemo and additional radiotherapy. It varies from cell to cell. However, surgery is mandatory in all cases.

When one is at the age of forty or above, one should go for mammography and if they are below forty, one can undergo ultrasonogram for early detection of breast cancer.

By Tahmid Azad Sohan
Photo courtesy: International Medical Consultants

Dr Radhika Lakshmanan is the Senior consultant of breast surgery of Farrer Park Hospital, Singapore with more than 20 years of surgical experience. She is accredited by the Royal College of Surgeons Edinburgh and was appointed as an Honorary Clinical Fellow in Breast Surgery at the Nottingham Breast Institute in 2011.