



# Liver Cancer and Hepatitis B

Liver cancer awareness month was first started in 2008 to raise awareness of liver cancer among the general population, in particular, awareness of the risk factors, symptoms and prevention of liver cancer. It also aims to provide liver cancer patients and their families with information on care and treatment options.

Liver cancer is one of most common cancer in Singapore and fourth in incidence amongst Singaporean men. Statistics from the Singapore Cancer Registry show 1,660 men contracted the disease between 2001 and 2005. Liver cancer is also the second most fatal cancer. Of more than 11,500 cancer deaths between 1998 and 2002, 13 per cent were from liver cancer, a total that trails only lung cancer.

Hepatitis B, a blood-borne virus that affects primarily the liver, is one of the most important causative factor of liver cancer and has been estimated to increase the risk of liver cancer by 300 times. The virus is transmitted through contact with the blood or other body fluids of an infected person - not through casual contact. The hepatitis B virus is 50 to 100 times more infectious than HIV. According to statistics from the Health Promotion Board, an estimated one in 35 adult Singaporeans carries the virus.

The incidence of liver cancer is much higher in East and Southeast Asia, including Singapore, than in the West predominantly due to the endemic nature of hepatitis B in our region. There is also

evidence to suggest that hepatitis B associated liver cancer portends a poorer prognosis than non-hepatitis associated forms in Western populations.

The incidence of liver cancer in Singapore can effectively be lowered by vaccination against hepatitis B. According to the World Health Organisation, the vaccine is 95 per cent effective in preventing hepatitis B viral infection and its chronic consequences, and is the first vaccine against a major human cancer. In Singapore, under a national immunisation programme, those born from 1987 onwards receive the vaccine. A substantial percentage of Singaporeans borne before 1987 have no immunity against the virus. The barriers to wide-spread vaccination of Singaporeans against hepatitis B are many. They range from a lack of awareness, cost of vaccination to inconvenience and inertia.

Even those who had been immunised should consider screening every five years to check if they require a booster vaccine shot.

The barriers are real but not insurmountable. This challenge presents a unique opportunity for the medical community and the pharmaceutical industry to come together to break down these barriers for the benefit of Singaporeans.



The Cancer Centre (TCC) is a silver lining of care, comfort and confidence to the community. Cancer itself can often bring up unanswered questions that relate to life, family and an uncertain future. The condition however, does not have to leave your patient or his or her loved ones unsure. Regardless of the questions that cancer may pose, we will give your patient answers... simply Because We Understand and Care.

TCC emphasises on preventive measures, actively conducts screening and avails of innovative-targeted treatments for adult cancers using proven technologies to ensure optimal patient safety and comfort.

