



More than just a case of back pain

Most remain unfamiliar with uterine cancer, but its incidence in Singapore is rising

Did you know: uterine cancer is the fourth most common women's cancer in Singapore today, and the most prevalent of these are malignant tumours known as adenocarcinoma, which form in the uterus lining. Dr Timothy Lim tells us more.

Q *What are the warning signs to look out for?*

A Most experience an abnormal vaginal bleeding such as post menopausal bleeding, irregular menstrual bleeding, or menorrhagia.

Symptoms such as pain in the pelvis, a mass in the area, and weight loss without trying are more common in later stages of the disease. In some cases, the patient may experience a non-bloody vaginal discharge as the only symptom.

However, the overall prognosis is good; more than 60 per cent of cases are detected early for a good chance of a successful treatment.

Q *How is screening done?*

A There is no established screening method, but there are established risk factors such as obesity, diabetes, and polycystic ovarian syndrome. In addition, women with hereditary nonpolyposis colon cancer (HNPCC, or Lynch syndrome) have a very high risk of uterine cancer.



Uterine cancer is the fourth most common women's cancer in Singapore today. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

Q *How recurrent is this condition?*

A According to the Singapore Cancer Registry, the age-standardised incidence rate for uterine cancer has increased significantly over the last 40 years — from 4.1 per 100,000 in 1975 to 1979 to 14.6 per 100,000 in 2010 to 2014. Uterine cancer mainly affects women above the age of 50.

Q *Describe treatment and prevention strategies.*

A Typically, surgery is done to remove the uterus, cervix, fallopian tubes and ovaries, as well as the pelvic lymph nodes.

Following surgery, additional treatment such as radiotherapy or chemotherapy may be required depending on the stage and type of cancer.

There is no sure prevention of uterine cancer, other than reducing the risk factors mentioned above by adopting a healthy lifestyle and preventing diabetes. Those with a strong family history or a known hereditary syndrome should seek medical advice from a doctor.

Seek the help of a gynaecologist early if you experience any form of abnormal vaginal bleeding.

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