

High-tech advances in liver cancer care



Latest radiotherapy technology enables better liver cancer treatment, according to private doctors. Liver cancer is the fourth most common type of cancer with 1,852 new cases recorded in 2013.

Ronnie Poon Tung-ping, medical director of the Hong Kong Integrated Oncology Centre, said surgery and laser therapy remain the preferred option but only 25 percent of liver patients are deemed suitable for an operation and 20 percent for laser therapy.

This is because the patients' liver function has been impaired or the tumor is not accessible, Poon said.

Radiotherapy is widely used to control cancerous tumors but Poon said it was previously not preferred for liver patients.

Poon said: "The proportion of patients developing radioactive hepatitis is about 50 percent and the death rate is rather high. About half of such patients die of liver failure."

But Poon said radiotherapy has been recently recognized as a liver cancer treatment, with new technology increasing the accuracy and minimizing the impact on neighboring healthy cells.

Tomotherapy and CyberKnife are the latest systems incorporating new imaging equipment, more powerful computers and software. The Hong Kong Adventist Oncology Centre acquired both systems in 2013. The CyberKnife can deliver multiple beams of high-dose X-rays to a tumor, said the Adventist center's clinical director Stephen Law Chun-key.

The Tomotherapy machine, Law said, is an image-guided radiation therapy system that accurately locates tumors and adjusts doses of radiation accordingly.

He also said the machine can deliver beams from 360 degrees and the built-in CT scan function captures images of tumors immediately before treatment sessions.