

Singapore to lead three new liver-cancer trials

BY DAWN TAY

SINGAPORE'S push into clinical trials will give hope to hundreds of liver-cancer sufferers around the region, with three new trials to be launched by a research group this year.

The trials will cover the "entire spectrum" of those afflicted by liver cancer, from those with localised small tumours to patients whose tumours have spread beyond the liver, said the group's clinical coordinator, Associate Professor Pierce Chow of Singapore General Hospital.

The group, the Asia-Pacific Hepatocellular Carcinoma Trials Group, was set up in 1997 and involves institutes from 11 countries. Singapore's National Cancer Centre (NCC) is its secretariat, and the database of trial results will be managed by the Singapore Clinical Research Institute (SCRI).

Several of the group's past trials, including one concluded last year, have extended patients' lives significantly, or improved the quality of their lives in their final months.

That latest trial treated 35 liver-cancer sufferers - who were unsuitable for surgery - with a novel therapy of **radioactive** microspheres that target the tumours, and the liver-cancer drug sorafenib.

It received around \$3 million in **pharmaceutical** backing for that trial, and the results were "extremely pleasing", said Prof Chow. He was unable to reveal more details, as the group is discussing the results in a major conference here tomorrow and aims to submit them for publication in academic journals.

It is looking into whether the treatment can be used as a standard-of-care in future.

Securing funding for initial trials was challenging, said Prof Chow. But, in recent years, pharmaceutical companies such as Bayer Schering Pharma, Novartis and Sirtex Medical have become increasingly interested in the group's efforts, and provided funding and drugs.

Liver cancer - the fourth-most-common cancer in the world - claims more than a million lives annually, with 80 per cent occurring in the Asia-Pacific region. About 400 people here die of it each year.

While not all clinical trials result in positive outcomes, patients do benefit from the better monitoring and care given, said SCRI chief executive John Rush.

Professor Soo Khee Chee, the NCC's chief executive officer and the group's chair, said that such trials have both economic and social **spin-offs**.

Such research activities are attracting foreign investments, such as Swiss pharmaceutical giant Roche's \$134 million investment in a translational research hub here, he said.

Through the trials, patients here and in the region can get access to expensive treatments which they would otherwise not be able to afford, he added.

dawnt@sph.com.sg

HELPDESK 我的字典

Afflicted: 被折磨 bèi zhé mó

Radioactive: 放射性的
fàng shè xíng de

Pharmaceutical: 药物的
yào wù de

Spin-offs: 副产品 fù chǎn pǐn
