

Scientists at NUS find way to slow cancer

By **LINETTE LAI**

SCIENTISTS at the National University of Singapore (NUS) have found a method to slow the progress of cancer.

When two specific proteins interact over a prolonged period, they observed, cancer is more likely to result. So they came up with a way to stop this interaction.

It sounds simple, but the reality is complex. First, the team had to map out the structure of one of the proteins. Then, they had to make sure that their technique did not stop the protein from performing its normal functions.

“A lot of cancer drug therapy have many side effects because you are interfering with other functions of the body as well,” explained Associate Professor Caroline Lee from the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine. “Hopefully, ours is more targeted.”

Prof Lee’s work is still in the early stages, and will not be tried out in humans any time soon.

However, animal tests showed that cancerous tumours that had been genetically modified by the team grew at a much slower rate, compared to regular tumours.

The next step will be to develop a drug that can achieve the same effect.

The team’s work was published in the prestigious American journal *Proceedings Of The National Academy Of Sciences* last year.

If it manages to find a way to make this treatment mainstream, the discovery could spell hope for liver cancer patients in particular, as the protein they target is commonly found in such cases.

In Singapore, liver cancer is among the top five most frequent causes of cancer deaths for both men and women. “The problem is that it’s usually detected very late,” said Prof Lee. “It is one of the few cancers for which there is hardly any treatment.”

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