

Programme to help manage – and treat – sarcoma cancer

By **SAMANTHA BOH**

PATIENTS diagnosed with sarcoma cancer will soon have more information on the treatment.

An orientation programme for the rare tissue cancer is expected to be launched by April.

The National Cancer Centre Singapore (NCCS) will highlight the symptoms, physiological and psychological, which are often

underreported by patients.

“We don’t really have good management and drugs for these symptoms because we don’t understand why patients have these problems,” said Associate Professor Alexandre Chan of the National University of Singapore (NUS), who is developing the programme. “This makes them very difficult to treat.”

The idea came from an NUS

study, also led by him, which found that sarcoma patients often do not report on their symptoms.

The study of 79 patients found that one in three complained of difficulty in sleeping, but only five had medication for insomnia.

Also, one in three experienced a lack of appetite yet only one patient was on medication for it.

It was the first study of Asian sarcoma patients, with the pur-

pose of understanding how their symptoms affect their quality of life and how medication is used.

At a briefing last Friday, Prof Chan said such patients might not know they are experiencing common side effects and hence might not raise them with their doctors.

“Some are afraid their medication would be stopped,” he said.

He said the lack of treatment of symptoms such as insomnia could

be due to the lack of evidence on how to manage these conditions.

While sarcoma cancer is very rare, with only 180 people diagnosed with it at the centre yearly, the duration of treatment can be rather long, said Dr Richard Quek, a senior consultant at NCCS, a collaborator in the NUS study.

Those with a tumour in their stomach, for instance, could be required to be on cancer medication

for three years to prevent a relapse, he said. This could mean a significant reduction in quality of life if the symptoms go untreated.

He said the study would be useful for clinicians as it gives a quick snapshot of the symptoms.

“... you can actively search (for the symptoms) when the patient comes in, and get them addressed,” he said.

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