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Kidney cancer cases on the rise in Singapore

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Singapore:Ã?Â There has been an 80 percent increase in kidney cancer cases in Singapore since 2003, and advanced kidney cancer accounts for 30 percent of all kidney cancer cases.

Poor awareness of this aggressive form of cancer is worrying doctors as it has low survival rates andÃ?Â generally fails to respond to chemotherapy, radiotherapy and hormonal therapy. Singapore's ageing population is especially facing this rising risk of advanced kidney cancer. At the global level, the disease incidence is rising at two percent annually.

"Kidney cancer has entered the list of top ten of cancers among males in Singapore, with a prominent rise in the number of cases in the last ten years, mirroring a true worldwide increase. Even more worryingly, approximately 20 percent of patients present in an advanced stage," says Dr Tan Min Han of Singapore Society of Oncology.

Peak incidence rates are between 60 years and 70 years of age, with men facing 1.5 times higher risk than women. Other risk factors include smoking, obesity, high blood pressure, long-term dialysis and genetic syndromes. Once metastatic disease develops, the prognosis for long term survival is poor, with five-year survival ranging from zero percent to 20 percent. Also, 50 percent of patients undergoing curative surgery are likely to experience relapse at distant sites.

Dr Tay Miah Hiang, from OncoCare Cancer Centre, says, "Although RCC is highly resistant to radiotherapy and chemotherapy, and while the condition is not curable, it is treatable for prolongation of life expectancy and reduced complications arising from disease progression."

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The active compound for the new treatment for advanced kidney cancer is manufactured in Singapore. The new drug for advanced kidney cancer helps prevent the formation of new blood vessels by blocking the growth of kidney cancer tumors that depends on blood vessels to survive. In doing this, it prevents the cancer progression and spread. However, as with all medications, this drug is associated with some side effects, including diarrhoea, hypertension and hair color changes.

"Medication is only as good as its side effects. With the improvements in new treatment options, patients with advanced kidney cancer should consult their doctors on what will work best for their condition. For the rest of Singapore's ageing population who remain at risk, early diagnosis is advised," Dr Tay said.