Hip fracture patients and the 5-year risk: Study

Increased possibility of death from infections during this period compared to non-fracture cases

BY

EMILY LIU

SINGAPORE — A study of Chinese Singaporeans has found that individuals who sustain hip fractures are at higher risk of dying in the five years after the fracture, compared to non-fracture cases, from causes like pneumonia and urinary tract infection.

And doctors should do more to inform patients and their caregivers of such a risk, said researchers of the study, which was conducted by the National University of Singapore Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health.

Of the 1,166 hip fracture cases examined by the researchers, 37 per cent of the subjects died within five years of sustaining the injury, compared to 22 per cent of non-fracture cases.

Five main causes of death after a hip fracture were identified: Stroke, coronary heart disease, pneumonia, urinary tract infection and cancer.

Presenting the findings yesterday, Associate Professor Gerald Koh, the study's lead author, said immobility after a fracture raises risks of chest and urinary tract infections. For example, consuming food while lying down may cause it to enter the lungs through the windpipe, causing infection, while difficulty in using toilets results in many patients retaining urine for longer periods of time, allowing bacteria to grow.

Among those with hip fractures, men were at greater risk of dying from pneumonia, and women from urinary tract infections.

The data was drawn from over 63,000 Chinese women and men who enrolled in the Singapore Chinese Health Study between 1993 and 1998. Researchers started analysing the cohort at the beginning of last year.
Doctors should inform patients of the increased mortality risk even after surgery and recovery and ensure they abide by preventative measures. Caregivers should also be aware of the risks and encourage patients to remain as mobile as possible, said Dr Koh.

“Infections are things that can be easily treated if caught early, hence doctor awareness and patient awareness are very important,” added Assoc Prof Wilson Wang, head consultant of the hip and knee surgery division at the National University Hospital.

Preventing osteoporosis — the weakening of bones — is also key, as it increases the risk of sustaining a hip fracture, said Dr Koh.

He added that there are plans to study rehabilitation measures to reduce mortality rates after hip fractures. Similar studies for the Malay and Indian population are also in the works.