Malay breast cancer patients have worst survival odds

BY JACQUELINE WOO

The odds of survival among late-stage breast-cancer patients who are Malay have been found to be the worst, when compared to Chinese and Indian women, a study has found.

Malay women were also found to be diagnosed at a significantly younger age and with larger tumours. Their tumours were typically found to have a median size of 43mm in diameter, compared to 26mm for Chinese women and 30mm for Indian women.

The study’s findings were revealed yesterday, at a briefing held at the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health (SSHSPH) in the National University of Singapore.

The study was a collaborative effort between researchers from SSHSPH and the University Malaya Medical Centre in Kuala Lumpur.

Over 6,300 breast-cancer patients were studied between 1990 and 2007. Of the sample, 2,449 women were from the National University Hospital, while the rest were from the medical centre in Malaysia.

It is the first known study of the impact of ethnicity on survival after breast-cancer diagnosis in South-east Asia. Conducted last year, the results were published in the scientific journal PLoS ONE in February.

It revealed that 53.6 per cent of Malay patients survive five years after they are first diagnosed, in comparison to 74.6 per cent of Chinese and 68 per cent of Indians. While the study did not say why Malay breast-cancer patients have the poorest survival rate, several possible reasons were cited.

Notably, only 79.8 per cent of Malay patients were found to have completed their treatment. The figures were higher for Chinese and Indian patients, at 92.7 per cent and 93.3 per cent respectively.

Other reasons include differences in tumour biology, treatment responses, lifestyles and socio-economic status.

However, breast cancer has been shown to be more common among Chinese women than Malays and Indians, said the study. The incidence rate for Chinese women is 61 per 100,000, 59 per 100,000 for Indians and 67 per 100,000 for Malays.

E-mail: jackw@nus.edu.sg