People with ET more vulnerable to leukaemia

Patients with Essential Thrombocythaemia (ET), or high platelet count, have higher risks of suffering from bleeding, thrombosis, myelofibrosis and acute myeloid leukaemia. The disease is a result of excess activity of the bone marrow. Secondary causes of the diseases include acute bleeding, removal of the spleen and inflammation such as rheumatoid arthritis.

A study conducted by The University of Hong Kong Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine in 2005 found that 54 per cent of ET patients surveyed had no visible symptoms, while 3 per cent showed signs of bleeding and 13 per cent had thrombosis.

On the other hand, the rate of occurrence of thrombosis and bleeding among the patients was 34 per cent and 17 per cent respectively. The probability of myelofibrosis transformation was 9.7 per cent after 10 years while about 2 per cent of patients developed acute myeloid leukaemia.

The projected 10-year thrombosis-free, bleeding-free, and overall survival rates of the patients were 66 per cent, 83 per cent and 80 per cent respectively. There were no deaths among patients aged 60 or below during a maximum follow-up period of 15 years. The high survival rate shows that on its own ET is not a chronic disease. Lack of ET awareness is to blame for patients not seeking treatment earlier and preventing ET from becoming a blood disease.