

## **Familial Aggregation can be found in Constipated Patients**

In Hong Kong, about 1 million people are suffering from constipation with a high prevalence rate of 14%. Constipation is categorised, by nature, into functional and organic. The underlying etiological factors are still obscured, though inadequate fibre and fluid intake has been proposed to be one of the possible causes. Recent studies suggested the presence of either a genetic or social learning hypothesis, and it is likely that both factors play important combined roles. A recent study conducted by the Department of Medicine, HKU Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine found that there is a familial aggregation in patients with constipation.

Between January and June 2005, 132 constipated patients diagnosed to have constipation and 677 first degree relatives (parents, siblings and children) were recruited. At the same time, 114 people without any symptom and diagnosis of constipation and 591 relatives were recruited as a control group.

The constipated patients and controls showed no statistical difference in age, sex, number of family members available for the questionnaire and marital status. However, the prevalence of constipation in the relatives of the constipated and control groups were 16.4% and 9.1% respectively.

The proportion of constipated patients with at least one family member having constipation is 47%, which is higher than the control group's 31.6%. The same tendency is observed in the proportion of constipated patients with two or more family members having constipation (27.3%) and that in the control group (9.6%). The results showed that people with more family members having constipation will have a higher risk of developing constipation. This may be due to underlying genetic factors, intra-familial learning or common environmental exposure.