

## **New light in fight against head and neck cancer**

Head and neck cancer is the third most common cancer in Hong Kong. In 2004, a total of 2087 new cases of this disease were diagnosed, with the figure increasing steadily every year. Head and neck squamous cell carcinoma (HNSCC) was the most common among these cases.

Factors that contribute to the development of HNSCC include infection caused by the human papilloma virus, alcohol and tobacco consumption, and low intake of fruit and vegetables.

Current treatment for advanced HNSCC often involves risky surgery. Despite advances in the treatment and control of HNSCC, the survival rate of patients suffering from this disease continues to be one of the lowest.

Researchers from The University of Hong Kong found that Lupeol, a compound commonly found in fruit, could help better fight HNSCC. They found Lupeol to be three times more effective than conventional chemotherapeutic drugs in suppressing the growth of tumours.

When used together with chemotherapeutic drugs, it can even increase the chemotherapeutic drug's cancer-fighting power 40-fold.

As a result of their findings, researchers at The University of Hong Kong are now pressing on with more studies before putting Lupeol through clinical tests. Because Lupeol is present in most fresh fruit and vegetables, people are advised to eat adequate amount of fruit and vegetables to stay healthy and to protect themselves from HNSCC .