

Encouraging

Lung cancer is the biggest killer in Hong Kong. More than 80 per cent of cases are caused by what is known as non-small cell carcinoma (NSCLC). But encouraging advances have been made in recent years in the treatment of NSCLC.

The current standard way of dealing with early-stage NSCLC is to resect completely the part of the organ affected by it. However, the 5-year survival rate is still less than satisfactory.

In the past decade, cisplatin-based chemotherapy had been used on patients following resection. Their survival rate is more favourable, and the side effects from this kind of chemotherapy were more tolerable.

Adjuvant chemotherapy, or additional chemotherapy, can be considered as part of standard treatment for younger patients in early disease stage who have responded well to resection.

The standard first-line treatment for recurring or advanced lung cancer is a treatment that uses a combination of chemotherapy and radiotherapy. For patients in relatively better conditions, using a combination of platinum and a newer chemotherapeutic agent (e.g. paclitaxel, docetaxel or gemcitabine) can further improve the survival rate.

The treatment of the future for lung cancer will probably involve the development of novel molecularly-targeted therapies and their application together with chemotherapy.

Using Bevacizumab, a drug which targets the angiogenesis in tumours, in conjunction with chemotherapy have shown very good results, but this treatment also increases the risk of haemoptysis, the coughing of blood, which is life-threatening.

Encouraging improvements have been made in treating lung cancer in recent years, providing more options for patients to deal with the deadly disease. This augurs well for lung cancer victims who may see some notable breakthroughs in the near future.