

Princess Margaret Hospital announces case concerning patient with hepatitis C infection

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

The spokesperson for Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH) made the following announcement today (June 27) regarding a patient with hepatitis C infection:

A 24-year-old male patient was admitted to PMH due to head injury on March 21 and transferred to high dependency unit of the Neurosurgery Department for treatment since April 11. The liver enzymes of patient deranged in the mid of June. Therefore the hospital has arranged the patient to undergo hepatitis C viral test on June 15 and the result was positive. However, the result of patient's hepatitis C viral test conducted in mid of April was negative.

The patient has been under treatment in the hospital all along therefore PMH is very concerned about the case and has followed up on possible route of transmission. After investigation, the hospital subsequently found that a 52-year-old hepatitis C carrier had stayed in the same cubicle from April 20 to May 24. Genetic sequencing showed that both patients are infected with hepatitis C with identical genetic sequence. The two cases are epidemiological linked and nosocomial infection of the 24-year-old male patient cannot be ruled out.

PMH has reported the case to the Centre for Health Protection (CHP). The hospital will continue to follow up and investigate the route of transmission with CHP. Hepatitis C virus is mainly transmitted through infected blood or body fluid. For example, sharing use of needles and syringes for drug injection, or equipment used for tattooing and body piercings. Healthcare-associated Hepatitis C virus transmission and outbreaks have also been reported worldwide, which were linked to breaches in infection control practice. The two patients concerned required frequent use of invasive catheters, having frequent blood test and intravenous injection, as well as undergoing wound care procedures due to their underlying diseases during hospitalisation has also increased the risk of infection. The ward concerned has been disinfected thoroughly. The hospital has also reviewed the infection control measures of the unit concerned, enhanced surveillance and infection control training of hand hygiene, environmental cleansing and care procedures are implemented.

PMH has prescribed antiviral drugs to the patient and explained the situation to his family. The patient is now in serious condition due to his underlying disease. Currently, antiviral drugs for acute hepatitis C are highly effective. In general, over 90 per cent of hepatitis C infection can be cured.

As a precautionary measure, the hospital has started contact tracing investigation and found that 16 patients had been admitted to the same cubicle in the same period of time, including the 24-year-old male patient and a patient who had passed away due to underlying disease. The Hospital will contact patients concerned to explain in details and arrange liver function and viral testing as well as health surveillance.

The incident has been reported to the Hospital Authority Head Office through the Advance Incident Reporting System.