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Singaporeans depend on Chinese medicine to treat arthritis

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Singapore to get serious on Knee osteoarthritis



Singapore: A local survey of elderly Singaporeans found 42 percent of the respondents to have knee pain with 40.7 percent living in pain for five years or more. The survey revealed that only five in 10 individuals choose to consult a doctor.

The survey also found that as high as 47 percent chose to suffer in silence or self-medicate. According to the survey report, nearly half of the patients refused to undergo surgery and only one out of 10 was open to undergoing surgery.

Knee osteoarthritis is one of the 10 most disabling diseases in developed countries, and is associated with reduced mobility and lower quality of life. Osteoarthritis is the underlying diagnosis for more than 90 percent of the increasing total hip or knee joint replacement operations being undertaken worldwide . The independent survey was sponsored by Wellchem Pharmaceutical to mark World Arthritis Day 2012.

The survey sought to find out from its more than 200 survey respondents aged between 50-69 years, their personal experience of osteoarthritis and the types of treatments they chose to relieve their pain and trauma. Most of the elderly surveyed when consulting a doctor on their knee pain, chose a GP [45.2 percent], a polyclinic [32 percent], Chinese physician [23 percent] or private specialist [22.5 percent].

The treatment most often prescribed by doctors, were painkillers [59 percent], followed by nutritional supplements [27.6 percent] and Traditional Chinese Medicine or TCM [18.8 percent].

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Though a proven and viable treatment option, awareness (and uptake) of hyaluronic acid (HA) injection was low, possibly borne out by the overall fear and resistance by patients to undergo knee surgery and or injections.

"Osteoarthritis is a serious debilitating condition with profound impact on a person's quality of life. However, there is evidence from research to show that early medical assessment and treatment improves a patient's quality of life and delays the need for surgical intervention," said visiting, Dr R Timothy Deakon, director of Oakville Sports Injury Clinic in Canada, here to exchange and share his experiences with the medical community on the less-invasive and proven results of hyaluronic acid (HA) injection to treat sports injured knees or worn-out knees of the elderly.

Dr Deakon described HA injections as another effective treatment for patients seeking to avoid knee replacement surgery and who failed to get effective and longer-lasting pain relief from standard medication or physical therapy.

He said that HA injections such as Monovisc, a singular gentle injection administered to the knee joints have been shown to provide pain relief for up to six months or more after each injection.

Dr Kevin Lee, Medical Director of the Centre For Joint & Cartilage Surgery and Singapore Sports Orthopaedic Surgery Centre, said that knee osteoarthritis is essentially widespread wear and tear of cartilage. This can be seen in older patients due to the degenerative, aging process or younger patients due to neglected sports or traumatic knee injuries.

"Once osteoarthritis sets in, the symptoms are likely to get worse over time. Patients choosing to limp around and delay treatment can worsen their condition as their cartilage may further degenerate," warned Dr Lee.