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New endoscopy centre to minimize surgical pains

More patients suffering from gastrointestinal diseases can be treated without major operations with the opening of the world-class Shaw Endoscopy Centre at the Prince of Wales Hospital today. The centre was established through a generous donation from the Shaw Foundation to the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

"Endoscopy is playing an increasingly important role in modern medicine," said Mr. Sydney Chung, the centre's director. The endoscope, which carries a tiny video camera at its tip, transmits the images from inside the body onto a television screen. The ability to see directly has greatly enhanced the doctor's ability to make an accurate diagnosis. It is also possible to perform treatment by inserting accessories through the endoscopes.

"Many diseases that need open surgery in the past can now be treated by endoscopy," said Mr. Chung, who is also Reader in the Department of Surgery of the Chinese University's medical faculty. The risks and sufferings of an operation is avoided. The convalescence and recovery process is shortened and the cost of hospital stay reduced. These are very important considerations for the Prince of Wales Hospital, where hospital beds are always at short supply.

The endoscopy unit at the Prince of Wales Hospital has done much pioneering work in the development of therapeutic endoscopy. In the past 10 years the team has concentrated on developing new treatments for diseases prevalent in Hong Kong. One good example is the treatment of acute suppurative cholangitis. Bile duct stones are very common in Hong Kong. When stones obstruct the bile duct, infection ensues and cholangitis occurs. This is one of the commonest causes of acute abdominal pain in Hong Kong. In the past, the only way to relieve the obstruction is by an emergency operation. This carried a mortality of up to 30%. The staff at the Prince of Wales Hospital have pioneered the use of an endoscopically inserted nasobiliary catheter to decompress the bile duct. The technique has been very successful in salvaging very ill patients without an emergency operation. The mortality is reduced to less than 5%.

Another very common clinical problem in Hong Kong is ulcer bleeding. At the Prince of Wales Hospital 5% of all emergency admissions to the hospital is due to bleeding from the upper gastrointestinal tract. The doctors at the Prince of Wales Hospital developed a method of controlling ulcer bleeding by injecting drugs through the endoscope. This simple and economical method pioneered by the unit has proved to be highly effective. The technique has gained international recognition and is now the most commonly used method in stopping ulcer bleeding world-wide.

As demands for endoscopy increase and the endoscopic procedures become more complex, the workload of the endoscopy unit completely outstripped the facilities available. Last year, the Shaw Foundation made available the generous donation. The Hospital Authority agreed to bear the building costs, and construction started last June. The Olympus Optical Company donated endoscopic equipment to support the establishment of a training centre for overseas doctors.

Officially opened today by the Deputy Director of the Xinhua News Agency, Mr. Zhang Junsheng, the Centre is one of the most advanced unit of its type in the world. It has a floor area of 500 square metres. There are 5 endoscopy rooms, a waiting area, an 8-bed recovery area and a designated area for cleaning and disinfection. Besides state-of-the-art video endoscopes, special features includes digital x-ray equipment, a computerised image storage and reporting system, and closed-circuit TV monitoring of endoscopy rooms.

These new facilities, made possible through the generosity of Sir Run Run Shaw, will provide better services for patients and facilitate training of doctors and nurses in new endoscopic techniques. A programme for training of doctors from South East Asia, especially China, is already in progress.

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