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CUHK PERFORMED HK's FIRST LAPAROSCOPIC CHOLECYSTECTOMY AT PWH

The first case of Laparoscopic Cholecystectomy in Hong Kong was performed successfully last week by a team of doctors from the Department of Surgery of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) at the Prince of Wales Hospital (PWH) in Shatin. A 41-year-old man with gallstones had his diseased gall bladder removed through his umbilicus without having his abdomen cut open.

Cholecystectomy (removal of the gall bladder) is one of the commonest surgical operations. Traditionally, it requires an abdominal incision of at least 10 cm in length. The wound is often painful and the abdomen is permanently scarred. Moreover the patient cannot return to work for several weeks.

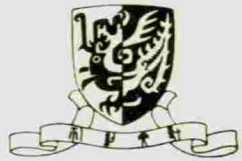
Laparoscopy (looking through a telescope inside the abdomen) has been in use for some years but combining this procedure with cholecystectomy is a recent innovation. In Laparoscopic Cholecystectomy, the surgeon inserts a laparoscope through the umbilicus. A television camera is attached to the laparoscope to give a view inside the abdomen. Surgical instruments are then inserted through small puncture holes in the abdomen to dissect out the gall bladder, which in turn is removed through the umbilicus.

The patient, a 41-year-old supplies supervisor with the Auxillary Air Force, has been suffering with gallstones for over ten years and has a diseased gall bladder. The operation was carried out smoothly and successfully under general anaesthesia on 21st June 1990 by Dr S C Sydney Chung and his team. There was minimal discomfort after the operation so much so that the patient was able to get out of bed by himself that same evening. The next day, he was eating normally and was walking around painfree. He returned to normal activities one week after the procedure. The puncture sites through which the laparoscope and instruments were inserted were hardly visible by one week.

Compared to traditional cholecystectomy, laparoscopic surgery minimizes the trauma of the operation. From the patient's point of view, post-operative discomfort is greatly decreased and the return to full activities is much faster. Cosmetically, the scarring from laparoscopic cholecystectomy is minimal. Because of the decrease in hospital stay, savings of hospital costs can be substantial. Moreover an earlier return to normal activities and work will have considerable benefits to the community.

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Laparoscopic Cholecystectomy is a major advance in the treatment of gall bladder disease. Preparation for this operation by the Department of Surgery, CUHK at the Prince of Wales Hospital extended over half a year. A team of surgeons first practised laparoscopic surgery using plastic models and then perfected their skills in anaesthetized pigs. The operation on patient was only carried out after all the technical difficulties were ironed out in animal experiments. The successful operation last week was the fruition of over six months of experimentation and preparation. This remarkable achievement of operating without cutting open the abdomen further confirms that the Department of Surgery at the Prince of Wales Hospital is at the forefront of surgical development not only in South East Asia but in the world. Last November, the Department of Surgery of The Chinese University announced their successful operation in helping deaf patients with the newly developed intracranial implantable hearing aid. Earlier this year the surgeons at the Prince of Wales Hospital again reported their pioneering work in treating birthmarks (port wine stains) by laser photodynamic therapy.

Professor Arthur K C Li, Chairman of the Department of Surgery hopes that the introduction of Laparoscopic Cholecystectomy in Hong Kong will mean that patients with gallstones can have their gall bladders removed with less pain, less scarring and less time off work. The Chinese University will be holding workshops in the near future to teach other surgeons who wish to learn this new technique.