



Published by
The Federation of Medical Societies of Hong Kong

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The Advent of Adjuvant Systemic Treatment

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Editor



Dr. William Foo

Dr CK Law, Director of the Hong Kong Cancer Registry, gave a detailed account of common cancer incidence in Hong Kong. It is clear that the pattern of cancers in Hong Kong is approaching those in developed countries. We are leaving behind cancers of the stomach, oesophagus, larynx, bladder... .. and embracing the affluent cancers of the breast, colon, prostate and endometrium.

In this same issue of the HKMD, various authors have contributed synopses of systemic treatment of these modern cancers. Adjuvant chemotherapy and endocrine therapy of cancers came a long way, starting from about 40 years ago. Step by step the treatment results improved. With each turn of a decade, adjuvant treatment of major cancers improved the survival rate by increments of a few percent. The best examples are in the adjuvant treatment of breast cancer and colon cancer. The cumulative improvement through the years resulted in marked reduction of cancer deaths compared to no adjuvant treatment.

Non-small cell carcinoma of lung is beginning to catch up. There are a few trials which all showed survival benefits in resectable stage I and II non-small cell lung cancer. At least a proof of the concept was shown. The best combinations / options remain to be determined.

With the targeted therapies starting to play important roles in the treatment of metastatic cancer, their roles as adjuvant treatment is gaining momentum. Trastuzumab in breast cancer is the most current and advanced example. One might speculate that bevacizumab and cetuximab would join the army in adjuvant treatment of colon and lung cancers.

Supportive treatment in cancer is also important. In this issue, new ways of dealing with toxicity of cancer treatments were described. Cancer treatment has never been better.