

NUH 'scores a first' in Asia with heart op

Minimally invasive procedure removed heart tumour and carried out bypass in one go

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When doctors were preparing Mr Seow Kim Hock for surgery to remove a heart tumour, they found another problem.

One of his arteries was blocked, and he needed a bypass that would traditionally involve cutting open his chest – including the ribs – to access the heart underneath.

But Associate Professor Theodoros Kofidis, of the National University Hospital (NUH), suggested a minimally invasive procedure to remove the tumour and carry out the bypass in one go instead.

The operation at NUH in February is believed to be the first of its kind in the whole of Asia.

Instead of a 20cm cut down the middle of his chest, all that the 63-year-old Mr Seow has to show for his surgery is a 6cm scar just under his armpit.

Unlike traditional open surgery, minimally invasive techniques mean less blood loss for the patient, a lower risk of infection, and overall faster recovery times.

Mr Seow underwent surgery on Feb 11, and was discharged six days later.

“When the patient comes in with two or three different problems (like Mr Seow), it’s very hard to do minimally invasive surgery,” Prof Kofidis said.

In Mr Seow’s case, however, doing so was important because parts of the jellylike heart tumour had found their way into his bloodstream and up to his brain, triggering strokes on two occasions.

“If you can give patients like that a less invasive procedure, they can benefit for their post-stroke rehabilitation – they can recover a bit faster,” Prof Kofidis said.

Mrs Seow, who declined to give her full name, recalled how her hus-

band, a security guard, had suffered the first stroke at work.

“One of his colleagues noticed that he wasn’t around, and they found that he had fainted in one of the toilets,” recalled the 58-year-old finance manager.

Doctors wanted to wait until Mr Seow’s condition had stabilised before sending him for surgery to remove the tumour, but then the second stroke occurred.

“The cut was very small, and we appreciated that because it saved us the hassle of taking care of two problems,” Mrs Seow said.

Now, Mr Seow is focusing on physiotherapy and trying to regain his memory, which was affected by the stroke.

Prof Kofidis said that while Mr Seow’s specific circumstances are rare, many patients have more than one problem with their hearts.

Many are also leery of surgery. “If they can postpone it, they will, to the point where they may endanger their lives,” he said. “And that’s why the less invasive platform is a must.”

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