Vital for HIV children 'to be detected, treated early'

04:45 AM Dec 01, 2011
by Ng Jing Yng

SINGAPORE - More public education is necessary to ensure that the healthcare system can detect children infected with HIV, so as to get them treated early.

Without such detection - or what Dr Gareth Tudor-Williams (picture) of Imperial College London called "missed opportunities" - HIV would only present its obvious symptoms in an infected child's teenaged years.

But by then, it will be too late as the virus would have already damaged the child's immune system and it is harder to treat the patient, the expert in HIV-infected children said in an interview yesterday.

According to KK Women's and Children's Hospital's (KKH) head of infectious disease service, Dr Thoon Koh Cheng, the hospital is working with the Communicable Disease Centre "on transitioning care of our older HIV children to adult care (and) are in the exploratory phases of an integrated clinic".

KKH is currently seeing 30 HIV-infected children. Last year, two new HIV cases were detected for those between the ages of zero and 14 and five new cases were seen for the ages between 15 and 19.

Dr Thoon said that managing teens who are diagnosed with HIV later gets trickier because not only do their lowered immune systems result in costlier treatments, their adolescence phase also means that "compliance to medications is a constant worry".

Dr Tudor-Williams, who was in town at the invitation of Nanyang Technological University's Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine, visited KKH on Tuesday and praised the hospital for its care management.

However, he noted that having an integrated family clinic would better ensure that all family members get treated and not the child alone.

To detect HIV in children earlier, Dr Tudor-Williams said the stigma attached to the virus has to be removed so that clinicians will be comfortable talking to patients about HIV and getting them tested. People will also be more willing to go for voluntary testing.

But he added: "HIV testing in children has to be handled sensitively ... it is important to be honest with the parents from the start."

AIDS can help impart concept of patient-centric care to doctors: Expert

by Ng Jing Yng

Given the misconceptions about AIDS and the stigma attached to it, the disease can be used as a teaching tool to impart the idea of patient-centric care to trainee doctors.

This will let the doctors "confront their ... beliefs and prejudices", said Dr Gareth Tudor-Williams, who is advising the coming Nanyang Technological University's Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine on its paediatric curriculum.

This would mean, for instance, putting aside one's views on homosexuality so they will not interfere with delivering good patient care.

"Patients pick up doctors' prejudices very fast (and) they will drop out of treatment ..." he said.

Meanwhile, the senior vice-dean of the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine, Professor Martyn Partridge, said the school is looking beyond public hospitals to give students an out-of-classroom experience. Options being explored include working with private sector doctors, community medical teams, polyclinics and practitioners, he added. Ng Jing Yng

URL http://www.todayonline.com/Singapore/EDC111201-0000039/Vital-for-HIV-children-to-be-