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**Press Release**

**For Immediate Release**

**New treatment gives Hong Kong liver patients more time to source matching liver donation**

*Liver Congress announces availability of liver dialysis*

**(Hong Kong, July 15, 2008)** – Liver specialists from Hong Kong brought some welcome news to patients waiting for a liver transplant organ donation at a media briefing during the Hong Kong-Shanghai International Liver Congress by announcing the availability of a new liver dialysis technology in Hong Kong.

The new technology makes use of albumin, a protein produced naturally in the liver, as the primary agent for removing toxins. A patient undergoing the procedure is connected to a conventional hemodialysis which dialyzes his or her blood against a re-circulating human albumin solution, resulting in the toxin being bound to the albumin solution.

It is important to note that liver failure is in some ways similar to kidney failure in that it is the result of an accumulation of toxins in the bloodstream. But the nature of toxins differs significantly between the two conditions.

In kidney failure, the toxins retained in the patient's body are generally water soluble which makes standard dialysis techniques, such as conventional hemodialysis and continuous renal replacement therapy (CRRT), effective in removing them. In liver failure, only some of the toxins accumulated are water soluble, while others are bound to blood proteins, particularly albumin.

Dr. Alexander Chiu, Associate Consultant, Queen Mary Hospital said, "This technology is not applicable to all liver failure patients, but will give eligible patients who are waiting for a transplant organ additional time to find a matched donor."

The shortage of donors has long been an issue in Asia, including Hong Kong. As in other Asian countries, religious, traditional and cultural beliefs often impose insurmountable barriers towards the promotion of organ donation in Hong Kong. Although there has been significant progress in the supply of deceased donor liver grafts as a result of improved public education, as well as advances in medical science that have made living donor transplant possible and expanded the criteria for organ acceptability, there is still a large shortage of donor liver grafts.

In 2007, there were 69 liver transplants in Hong Kong, 20 of which were from deceased donors. However, the number of patients in need of a liver transplant during that period was more than double that at 150.

In Hong Kong, patients waiting for a suitable donor are ranked by disease severity based on a Model for End Stage Liver Disease (MELD) score which is aimed at allocating potential liver grafts in the most transparent, equitable and objective manner possible. Ironically, while patients low on the list may wish to move up in priority, by the time they do so because of increased disease severity, they may not survive long enough for a suitable graft to become available.

**Website**

[www.livercongress.org](http://www.livercongress.org)

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Hence, the mortality rate among those on the waiting list remains high at around 40 percent which has prompted some patients to explore the alternative of going north to undergo liver transplantation in mainland China. With a significantly higher complication rate in the 40 to 50 post-transplant patients returning to Hong Kong from the mainland each year, the additional workload for the liver transplant service at Queen Mary Hospital is substantial.

Doctor Chiu added, "While the technology gives eligible patients more time to find a matched donor, we still need to do more in public education to promote organ donation so that more end stage liver disease patients can be saved."

The new liver dialysis technology is now available at Queen Mary Hospital and a few private hospitals in Hong Kong.

The Hong Kong-Shanghai International Liver Congress meets biannually. This year it runs from today to 12 and 15 June 2008 at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre. More than 2,000 distinguished liver specialists around the world will present their latest findings and unique experiences in the study and treatment of different types of liver disease.

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