

By Dr. Ben Fong
Specialist in Community Medicine



Is it CANCER?!

Mr Chung is a bus driver for many years, married with a three-year old daughter. He was “brought” to the clinic by his wife to consult their family doctor for a checkup. They looked serious but very worried. Mrs Chung had just given birth to a baby daughter.

Mr Chung had lost nearly 10 kg since their baby was born a month before. He felt tired and was hesitant to consult the doctor because he was worried that it might be a cancer. He was otherwise asymptomatic and was going to work as usual.

The history showed that in the previous few weeks Mr Chung was feeling thirsty most of the time and was going to the toilet much more often than usual to urinate. The polydipsia and polyuria were typical for untreated diabetes, arising from high blood sugar level. Physical examination did not find any other abnormalities. The blood pressure and pulse rates were within normal limits.

The doctor performed a glucometer test with a drop of blood from Mr Chung. The spot sugar level was too high that the instrument was not able to show a number. Hence a diagnosis of diabetes was made. In view of Mr Chung’s stable conditions, oral medications were prescribed to manage the hyperglycaemia. Further questioning also revealed a family history of diabetes. Mr Chung’s mother had been a diabetic for a number of years.

When Mr Chung was reviewed a week later, his blood sugar level was around 10 mmol/L. This was not desirable but had indicated that the treatment was effective. Mr Chung continued to be treated with oral tablets, and the blood and urine test results three months later were all within normal ranges. He gradually put on some weight but was warned against a progressive gain. Mr Chung was advised on the appropriate lifestyle, particularly in diet and regular exercise. He was also told to relax because his diabetes might have been “triggered” by stress arising from the birth of their second child. The family was well and Mr Chung’s blood sugar had been stable.