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## Cuts are docs' order for strokes

Public hospitals in Hong Kong should provide round-the-clock thrombectomy treatment - the surgical removal of a thrombus from a blood vessel - for **stroke** patients, a concern group said.

Thrombectomy is an interventional surgical procedure to remove clogs in major arteries in the brain of a patient that can lead to strokes.

The **Stroke** Fund said that compared with the conventional treatment of thrombolysis, in which patients are given an injection to dissolve the blood clot, the surgical procedure will see them twice as likely to live independently.

Hospital Authority data shows there were 10,752 **stroke** cases in 2016 and 2017, with 838 patients treated with thrombolysis.

Fund council member Joshua Fok Wai-ming, a neurosurgical specialist, said the conventional treatment had been widely adopted in treating acute **stroke** patients for more than 20 years.

"Its principle is to inject the thrombolysis solution into the patient within 4 hours of the **stroke** to dissolve blockades in the arteries," he said. "By doing so, we hope to clear the clogged vessels and supply blood and oxygen to the surviving brain cells as soon as possible."

However, Fok said, this traditional method of injection is subject to many limitations and only a fraction of **stroke** patients can receive the treatment.

"Patients have to undergo strict screening before doctors decide to adopt thrombolysis as it might cause adverse effects and in a worst case, induce a second **stroke**," he said.

Fok said thrombectomy can be a better option, especially those not suited for thrombolysis treatment.

Neurosurgical specialist Derek Wong Ping-hong said thrombectomies have proven to be effective in preventing patients from suffering permanent disability.

He said the surgical procedure is applicable to patients who have suffered a serious **stroke**, particularly those involving clogs in major brain or neck arteries that measure two millimeters or more.

"Doctors thread a miniature tube into the clogged artery to remove the thrombus," he said.

"About 15 to 20 percent of **stroke** patients with blocked blood vessels can receive this treatment, or about 1,500 patients in the SAR every year. But only 83 people underwent this procedure in 2016 and 2017."

Fund founder Dawson Fong To-sang urged the authority to introduce thrombectomy services in more hospitals to reduce the death rate.

Only five to six public hospitals currently provide this service.

"The authority should look into establishing a referral system and screening acute *stroke* patients for thrombectomy," he said. "If we don't improve our treatment mechanism, more patients would become disabled and put an extra burden on our health-care system."

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