

Family doctor diagnoses rare tumour, helps save woman

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ABU DHABI — A 45-year-old female patient suffering from high blood pressure was diagnosed with a rare tumour by a family physician at Al Bateen Clinic of the Shaikh Khalifa Medical City (SKMC).

The right diagnosis has prompted the patient to undergo surgery at Mayo Clinic in the US early this year. The laparoscopic excision was successful and the patient was discharged after two days.

According to Dr Wael Karamah, family medicine specialist at SKMC, the patient suffered from unstable blood pressure and was diagnosed with episodic blood pressure by other physicians. She also suffered from other symptoms not associated with the common high blood pressure, including palpitation, hot flushes, headache, sweating face, breathing problems and fatigue.

"She has been to different doctors in Dubai and Abu Dhabi for the last year and a half and no one diagnosed her correctly," said Dr Karamah, adding that the patient is also diabetic, has high cholesterol and high calcium.

The tumour, known as pheochromo-



Dr Wael Karamah

cytoma, was found in the adrenal glands above the right kidney.

"This kind of tumour is extremely rare and very risky and may affect only one person in every million population... and it could pass without diagnosis. It was risky because if she got pregnant and she underwent caesarean section or she had an appendectomy, and the tumour was wrongly approached, it would have released high levels of hormones that caused high blood pressure and she might have died.

"But, if correctly diagnosed and treated, the patient would have a hundred per cent recovery," he added.

Dr Wael has confirmed the presence of the tumour after checking the

amount of hormones released by the tumour in the urine in 24 hours. Laboratory analyses also showed high sugar and blood cholesterol levels. In the second week, medical tests revealed a high increase of the hormones in the urine, which is over 34 times the normal level.

A CT scan showed the five-centimetre tumour in the right adrenal gland over the right kidney. The scan also showed that the tumour is squeezing the inferior vena cava which carries de-oxygenated blood from the lower half of the body into the right atrium of the heart. Dr Karamah said the tumour was benign although 10 per cent of such tumours are malignant and usually spread in the lymphatic glands in the neck, chest and abdomen.

Speaking about the important role played by family physicians in primary care, the Lebanese doctor said, "Family medicine is the basis of the healthcare system. A good family physician can (also) diagnose rare as well as common cases through doing research," he told *Khaleej Times*.

Dr Karamah has previously returned from the US where he wrote a case report on his findings of this rare tumour. His article is currently being reviewed by the specialists at Mayo Clinic and will be published in one of the US medical journals. — olivia@khaleejtimes.com