

New 'stone service' to help kidney patients

The private City Hospital in Dubai has introduced a new 'stone service' to provide minimally invasive treatment

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Expert hand: Dr Noor N.P. Buchholz, visiting urologist at City Hospital.

Dubai: The private City Hospital in Dubai has introduced a new 'stone service' to provide minimally invasive treatment with overseas expertise for kidney patients.

"The unique service has been launched in response to the high prevalence and need to treat urinary stone disease in the UAE which falls in the stone belt," said UK-based Dr Noor N.P. Buchholz, visiting consultant urologist at the hospital.

Dr Buchholz, who is Director of Endourology & Stone Services at Barts and The London NHS Trust in London, visits City Hospital every six weeks to conduct the procedure.

"People will no longer need to travel to the UK or other countries to avail of this facility," he said, noting that keyhole surgery for kidney stones are still rare compared to gynaecological and gall bladder surgeries.

Unlike traditional open surgery which is commonly followed in the UAE to remove stones from kidneys, ureters and the bladder, he said minimally invasive keyhole procedures use ultra-fine surgical instruments and laser fibres to fragment and remove stones.

"This is done through existing natural orifices or tiny holes in the skin. Even for large stones, small holes can be made in the back or the abdomen to get to the kidney," he said.

The main benefits of this surgery are that the patient has less pain and can get back on his feet much faster. "Patients need to stay in hospital for just a day or two." Also, from a cosmetic point of view, there are hardly any scars after the surgery, he said.

The average cost of the surgery, which is covered by insurance, is around Dh40,000.

Dr Bucholz said stones comprise over 50 per cent of the workload for urologists in the UAE as it falls in the stone belt.

"This is a dry and warm area and is part of the stone belt which starts in the Gobi desert of China and passes through India, the Middle East, North Africa and southern United States and Mexico," he said. "Stones are a civilisation disease. People eat a lot of meat and do not drink enough water," he said, adding that family history is also a risk factor.

Common symptoms of stone disease include renal colic, acute pain, water infections and blood in the urine.

To guard against stones, he said, one should follow a healthy lifestyle and a balanced diet that does not include too much meat and animal protein. Salt intake should be low. As a rule of thumb, one must also have a big glass of water every hour when awake.

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