

The Delivery of disease modifying drugs for MS in Hong Kong



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Neurologists in Hong Kong have faced challenges on treating multiple sclerosis, especially on the disease modifying drugs (DMD). The challenges include: the need for prevalence study, the need for DMD, second line DMD, too few neurologists and the difficult MS cases.

In the past, it was difficult to get government support on DMD. This was due to uncertain prevalence and also the high cost of the disease modifying drugs. With statistical studies, the prevalence of MS was clearly defined, and government is now willing to support interferon treatment.

In the past 20 years, when the economy was down, different diseases have witnessed competition for resource. For example, between 1997 to 2003, interferon was "self-financing item" and MS patient had to pay the IFN. Samaritan Fund was introduced in early 2000, with 10 million (HKD) for 10 rare diseases, including leukemia, rheumatoid drugs, cardiac pace maker and hip joint prosthesis. While Samaritan Fund had to wisely use the resources, expertise of each disease group had to propose their own screening mechanism.

The Hong Kong multiple sclerosis expert panel was formed under this condition. They Panel proposed a two tier screening system, medical and social screening system. The panel proposed the entry and exit criteria, as well as inclusion and exclusion criteria. There was also a yearly vetting system which helped to ensure that the patient has the agreed disease activity. Later when other second line disease modifying drugs (fingolimod and later natalizumab) became available, the Panel proposed similar vetting system, with reference from developed countries.

With this mechanism, the panel will make suggestion both to the patient and to the caring neurologists. When a patient has atypical presentation, or the MRI finding was uncommon, a whole panel discussion would be carried out before the final decision. For a region with few multiple sclerosis patients, it is necessary to wisely administer expensive medication, as well as a learning process for all who care for MS.
