

PMB gets first endobronchial ultrasound scan bronchoscope

A new bronchoscope that enables improved diagnostic evaluation of medical conditions such as lung cancer has been installed at Netcare St Anne's Hospital in Pietermaritzburg. According to cardio-thoracic surgeon, Dr James Fulton, who practices at the hospital, it is the first private hospital in the province to receive the endobronchial ultrasound scan (EBUS) bronchoscope.

This innovative technology enables improved diagnosing and evaluation of cancers of the lungs and airways as well as other medical conditions and infections.

Dr Fulton explains that the EBUS bronchoscope is guided into the chest area via the mouth and has an ultrasound probe fitted to its tip, which makes it possible for doctors to see inside a patient's airways. The scope also has a fine needle that enables it to take samples of body tissue to assist doctors in making a diagnosis and/or a prognosis.

"The EBUS bronchoscope can also be navigated into a difficult to reach area in the chest called the mediastinum, where the heart, thymus, oesophagus, trachea and lymph nodes are located. Unlike other bronchoscopes, EBUS can therefore be used to investigate lymph nodes in the mediastinum and take tissue samples, so that doctors can see the extent to which lung cancer has spread. It is also useful in diagnosing other cancers and medical conditions, such as tuberculosis (TB) and sarcoidosis."

"With the introduction of this technology, it is now possible for us to improve our evaluation of a number of medical conditions, ascertaining exactly at what stage the lung cancer is and how far it has spread. This, in turn, allows us to use the most appropriate treatments."

The EBUS technology has a number of advantages over other interventions. For example, doctors do not have to perform major exploratory surgery, which means that the procedure is safer and patient recovery times are much quicker. In addition, the EBUS procedure enables doctors to take tissue samples from some of the most inaccessible areas in the body. A pathologist can then investigate these biopsy samples.

He adds that the EBUS bronchoscope has better manoeuvrability than other similar technologies, which tends to improve operator efficiency. In addition, the ultrasound scope provides high quality imaging, making it both highly effective and safe as a diagnostic tool.

Netcare St Anne's Hospital GM, Louis Joubert, says a R125 million project is underway at the hospital to ensure that the hospital remains at the forefront of medical care and continues to provide outstanding medical services to the community of Pietermaritzburg and the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands well into the future. The project entails the upgrading of facilities, technology and equipment as well as certain expansions. The acquisition of the EBUS bronchoscope technology is part of this process.