



## **MEDIA ADVISORY**

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## **New Study Shows South Asians Vulnerable To Heart Disease Because of Faulty Gene**

**Singapore (January 29, 2009)** – A recent study published in Nature Genetics and covered by the Straits Times (Millions at risk from faulty gene, 20 January 09) reported that tens of millions of people from the Indian subcontinent are vulnerable to cardiomyopathy (CM) – which literally means “heart muscle disease” – because of a defect in the MYBPC3 gene that provides the blueprint for a heart protein.

The new research by an international team of 25 scientists and doctors from four countries found that about four per cent of the 1.5 billion people in the Indian subcontinent are carriers of this MYBPC3 mutation. Carriers of this faulty gene demonstrate an increased risk of heart failure that is exacerbated by high blood pressure, age and environmental factors.

In response to concerns by heart patients, members of the public and health professionals in Singapore, Associate Professor Terrance Chua, Chairman of the Singapore Heart Foundation (SHF) explained: “This is an interesting study that suggests that genes that cause cardiomyopathy (heart muscle disease) are relatively common, affected up to 4% of South Asians, so one should expect to see a higher prevalence of this condition in Indians. I have not personally observed this in my patients, and further research in this area would be helpful. It is important to note that different kinds of gene mutations can also give rise to cardiomyopathy, and not all individuals with a specific gene will develop the disease that is related to it. For some people, the effect of this mutation may not manifest until later in life.”

When asked whether routine screening for this mutation would be helpful, A/Prof Chua commented that: “Screening for genes linked to cardiomyopathy is generally not yet recommended in the



general population, as the tests may not detect all the possible mutations that give rise to cardiomyopathy, and not everyone with a particular gene will develop the disease that is related to it.” Genetic tests may sometimes be helpful for screening the family members of a patient with a particular inherited disease, especially if other tests are inconclusive.

“Atherosclerotic heart disease is the most common form of heart disease in the general population in Singapore. Cardiomyopathy is far less common,” said Dr C Sivathasan, a member of the Board of the Singapore Heart Foundation.

Dr Low Lip Ping, Chairman Emeritus of SHF concurred and added that there is as yet no indication that this gene mutation has any relation to atherosclerotic disease and therefore no indication to do tests to screen for this gene mutation to assess risk of heart attack or stroke.

The Singapore Heart Foundation urges Singaporeans to take a holistic approach towards combating heart diseases by adopting a healthy lifestyle and going for regular health screenings.

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### **About Singapore Heart Foundation**

The Singapore Heart Foundation (SHF) is a non-profit charitable organisation committed to promoting heart health in Singapore, as well as preventing and reducing disability and death due to cardiovascular diseases and stroke.

Established in 1970, SHF fulfils its mission through educational programmes highlighting preventive measures against heart disease to the public. The Foundation funds community-based research to better understand the landscape of heart disease in Singapore. SHF also focuses on rehabilitative care in its *SHF-Isetan Foundation Heart Wellness* centre for recovering heart patients. In addition, SHF offers financial assistance to needy heart patients for emergency relief as well as for treatment. For more information, please visit [www.myheart.org.sg](http://www.myheart.org.sg).