

Operation on Dr M by all-local team

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — The coronary bypass surgery on Prime Minister-k Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Jan 24 was performed entirely by a team of Malaysian surgeons, supporting professionals and staff.

The team was led by the General Hospital's senior consultant, cardio-thoracic surgeon Encik Yahya Tun Awang, and assisted by Dr Rozali Wa-tooth, previously of the General Hospital and now with a private medical centre.

"The chief anaesthetist, Datuk Dr S. Rathakrishnan, and other doctors, nurses and other technical crew were all from the Kuala Lumpur General Hospital," Deputy Health Minister Datuk K. Pathmanaban said today.

"His (Dr Mahathir's) post-surgery recovery is also being monitored by Malaysian staff at the cardiac intensive care unit," he said.

Datuk Pathmanaban said that Dr Mahathir was given various other options for the surgery, including going overseas or obtaining a leading foreign surgeon, but the Prime Minister said he was satisfied with the Malaysian team and there was no need to seek outside help.

Waiting list

Asked why the surgery was done so soon after Dr Mahathir complained of chest pains, Datuk Pathmanaban said that surgeons nowadays felt that it was better to have an operation early if the patient was fit enough.

Meanwhile, our investigations reveal that local patients needing coronary bypass surgery can have it done locally at half the cost of seeking treatment abroad.

These operations can be performed at the Kuala Lumpur General Hospital, the University Hospital and the Subang Medical Centre.

An operation at the Kuala Lumpur General Hospital could be done "at very little" cost and the patient would be attended to by some of the best heart surgeons in the region, medical authorities said.

The rates charged by the General Hospital and Univer-

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sity Hospital were, however, not available. At the Subang Medical Centre it would cost about \$25,000. The amount covers the preliminary investigation and surgery. The cost of having a similar operation in Australia exceeds \$60,000.

"An operation in Perth, for instance, would require between A\$27,000 and A\$30,000 (M\$64,800 and \$72,000)," said Datuk Dr G. Selvaraju, the general-secretary of the Malaysian Medical Association.

This would include the cost for the air fare and 10-day accommodation for the patient. The expenses of those accompanying the patient are not included in this figure.

Apart from Australia, which is the most popular choice for bypass operations, Malaysians also go to the United States and the United Kingdom while a small number prefer Singapore.

"I believe one of the reasons for Malaysians seeking treatment overseas is because at times the waiting list at the General Hospital could be long and patients are not willing to wait," Datuk Dr Selvaraju said.

He added that most of the heart patients needing treatment were from the low-income group. He said Malays and Indians appeared to be more prone to heart disease, probably because of their dietary habits.

"The risk factors include the cholesterol level, smoking, lack of exercise, being overweight and associated diseases like hypertension and diabetes."

He said it was important that people above the age of 40 go for regular medical check-ups — at least once every two years.

"As age advances, the checks should be more regular. People should also watch their weight and diet, exercise regularly and stop smoking."

"To a large extent, heart ailments are preventable," he added.