

Specialist services being decentralised, says PM

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Better medical care for all

By Alex Choong

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. — The Health Ministry is actively pursuing its programme of decentralising its specialist services in response to increasing demand for accessibility to better medical care from the people. Prime Minister Datuk Seri ~~Dr Mahathir Mohamad~~ said tonight.

Dr Mahathir said the programme was also being carried out in response to the need to expand the coverage of medical services.

Speaking at the 7th Asean Congress of Anaesthesiologists dinner, he said to begin with, surgical, medical and obstetric and gynaecological services were now provided in district hospitals.

"It is the intention of the Health Ministry to provide sub-speciality services in a planned manner in General Hospitals while continuing to develop the Kuala Lumpur General Hospital as the national referral hospital."

The expansion and decentralisation of specialist services have resulted in increasing demand for specialists in the various medical specialities including anaesthesiologists in the Health Ministry, Dr Mahathir said.

"The establishment of new private hospitals has further increased the demand for anaesthesiologists.

"In order to ensure that the expansion programme of the Health Ministry is not thwarted by the lack of anaesthesiologists, we have started local post-graduate training programmes in this field.

"At the same time, local doctors have also been sent for post-graduate training overseas.

Dr Mahathir said the country had made substantial progress in the provision of medical and health care over the past 34 years since independence.

"The infant mortality rate has declined from 75.5 per 1,000 live births in 1957 to 13.2 in 1989 while the maternal mortality rate declined from 2.8 per 1,000 live births to 0.2. Life expectancy has increased from 55.8 to 69 years for males and 58.2 to 73.5 years for females," he said.

The Prime Minister said that since health services formed an important aspect of the country's development plans, it was important to ensure that the people have access to the latest health care facilities, so that they could enjoy a better standard of living.

"This means, among other things, that the planning has to be flexible so as to be able to accommodate changing situations and problems.

"In order to provide effective patient care programmes, we must be innovative and look for new ways to improve medical and health services in our respective countries," Dr Mahathir said.

On the need to keep pace with rapid advances in the field of medicine, he said increasing sophistication in technology had resulted in new developments and advances in biomedical engineering and the development of sophisticated equipment.

"The Government has been acquiring these new equipment in a judicious manner, always taking into account their cost effectiveness and benefits for patients."