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Mahathir-Health

DOCTORS BEING TRAINED FOR LIVER TRANSPLANTATION PROGRAMME

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan.27<sup>94</sup> (Bernama) -- The Ministry of Health has<sup>P</sup> selected many young doctors for specialised training overseas to meet the demand for liver transplantation in the country.

Stating this here today, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said while liver resection had been available in Malaysia since 1964, there was currently no liver transplantation programme in the country.

He added that the establishment of specialised transplantation units which, perhaps, would serve only 15 to 20 per cent of liver patients would place an additional burden on the country's economy.

"Nevertheless, as Malaysia moves to be a fully developed industrialised country by the year 2020, I am confident that we will not only have the resources but highly trained medical personnel to equal the other developed countries in specialised medical care," he said.

He was opening of the 9th Biennial Scientific Meeting of the Asian-Pacific Association for the Study of the Liver here. -- more

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Dr Mahathir said the government spent considerable sums of money yearly towards the eradication of communicable and preventive diseases with improvement of health in the rural areas and small towns always its first priority.

The public's cry for more sophisticated diagnostic and treatment procedures would increase medical cost, especially for Malaysia which had a non-contributory free medical service for all, he added.

He said: "Even rich nations find that the government itself cannot afford to pay the high costs of medical care. Without private medicine, a National Health Service is just impracticable."

Dr Mahathir said Hepatitis B was expected to be eradicated in Malaysia within one or two decades through its programme of mandatory vaccination for all new born infants introduced in 1989.

The incidence of Hepatitis A, endemic in Malaysia, was expected to decline with better sanitary conditions, good water supply and hygiene, he added. -- more

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He also said in the last two to three years with the availability of immunoassay to screen Hepatitis C antibodies, it was now possible to identify those infected with Hepatitis C.

The Ministry of Health embarked on routine screening of all blood donors since 1993 and private hospitals and institutions were now following also doing so.

He added that every effort was being made to discourage young people from falling into drug addiction as the source of infection of the Delta Virus (D) was 34 per cent among intravenous drug addicts and the incidence of Hepatitis B in this group was 39 per cent.

Speaking to reporters later, Dr Mahathir said the government might set up an institute, specially for Hepatitis B like the National Heart Institute.

"We have many other priorities concerning health and, in fact, we feel the Kuala Lumpur Hospital requires a new building. This is a problem... it is difficult for us to consider," he added.

He said the government might seek other ways through privatisation to provide health services in big towns.

About 600 academics, clinicians and research members on all aspects of the liver, from Malaysia and overseas, are attending the four-day meeting.

An exhibition on liver diseases and treatment was held in conjunction with the meeting. -- Bernama

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