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Mahathir-treatment

HIGH MEDICAL COMPENSATIONS CAUSING POOR TO SUFFER, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 10 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the ridiculously high compensations awarded by the courts to patients in many developed countries had resulted in the poor being deprived of medical treatment.

"We must sympathise with the victims of irresponsible practices, but the cost of this misguided sympathy, in terms of deprivation of medical treatment, is infinitely higher," he said when opening the 11th Asian Pacific Federation Congress of the International College of Surgeons (ICS), here.

The excessive court awards had resulted in doctors either avoiding to help in accident cases, conducting unnecessary and costly investigations or charging high fees to cover high insurance premiums, he said.

The prime minister said this had led to the poor being deprived of medical treatment and even members of the middle-income group can be bankrupted by medical bills.

About 350 participants from 24 countries are attending the four-day congress. Present were Dr Mahathir's wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali and Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng.

At the ceremony, Dr Mahathir was conferred the ICS' Honorary Fellowship by its president, Prof Earl Owen.

While acknowledging the need to protect patients from incompetent and careless treatment by the practitioners of medicine and surgery, Dr Mahathir said that awarding ridiculously high compensation "does no one any good".

The prime minister said that because of the excessive awards, medical insurance had become unaffordable and even governments were not in the position to provide basic medical care for the people.

Dr Mahathir said that up to now Malaysia had been quite free of the kind of litigation mania found in many developed countries and he hoped that Malaysia will remain free of this craze.

He said that as Malaysia strove to become a fully developed nation by the year 2020, its progress would be balanced in all fields, be it in education, industry or new technology, and would be guided by the country's beliefs, moral values and traditions.

"We welcome the free flow of information and knowledge which can contribute towards our progress," he said, adding that the government would also support research and development.

He invited the ICS, an institution that provides medical knowledge all over the world, to participate in Malaysia's ever expanding sphere of medical education, especially in the training of young surgical scientists.

The prime minister also urged the participants of the congress to take into consideration the escalating costs of new techniques and their effects on developing countries.

He said they have to examine the ethical and medico-legal implications of the new methods and also to be sensitive to cultural and religious feelings.

Touching on the developments in the medical field, Dr Mahathir said the most important one was the advent of molecular biology which had contributed towards major advances in the understanding and treatment of inherited diseases and disease disposition.

"The discovery of the variation of genes and mutations in the process

of carcinogenesis appears not only exciting but also a promising development in the battle against the disease," he said.

Further research in this direction might even help to conquer the deadly human-immunodeficiency virus (HIV), he added. --Bernama