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Creating awareness of liver diseases

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - One in every nine Malaysians carries viral hepatitis, often unknowingly, and one of every 25 carriers passes it on to others.

Each year, up to 25,000 Malaysians are infected with hepatitis B - a virus much more infectious than HIV - and these people have 100 times greater chance of developing liver cancer than those not infected.

It was because of this lack of awareness of liver and liver-related diseases that the Malaysian Liver Foundation was registered in April last year.

The non-profit organisation, of which the patron is Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, looks to education of the public on early diagnosis and treatment of such diseases, as the main way to curb the problem.

The foundation also holds exhibitions, forums and seminars, and distributes pamphlets to create awareness on prevention and care.

MLF also aims to help train doctors to be more effective in dealing with such diseases, to conduct research in the field, and to help patients and families cope.

It is estimated that about 2.5 million Malaysians have viral hepatitis. About 90 per cent of liver cancer diagnosed in carriers in Malaysia have been linked to viral hepatitis.

Liver cancer has been one of the top seven causes of cancer locally for the past 10 years, and is ranked eighth among the most common cancers seen in Malaysian males in 1995.

Statistics from the Kuala Lumpur Hospital's Blood Transfusion Unit indicate that about 1.7 per cent and 0.3 per cent of blood donors in 1995 have been found to be hepatitis B and hepatitis C carriers, respectively.

MLF's board of trustees includes Tun Mohamed Hanif Omar, Datuk Paduka Dr Saleha Mohd Ali and SungeiWay Group president Tan Sri Dr Jeffrey Cheah.

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