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Don: Malaysia poised to meet future health care needs

KUALA LUMPUR, Tue. - Malaysia is in a position to shape and determine health care policies to cope with future demands as it moves from a traditional to a modern economy, an American professor of economics said today.

Prof Victor R. Fuchs, who is the Henry J. Kaiser JR. Professor Emeritus at Stanford University said Malaysia's challenge in health care would be to formulate policies to meet current demands and also the future.

Fuchs was delivering the 1997 Perdana Lecture at the Putra World Trade Centre here which was attended by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

His lecture was titled The Challenges to Health Policy in Modern Economies.

Fuchs said with the decline of domestic health care, as women entered the job market, society would have to depend almost entirely on more organised and comprehensive health care.

Furthermore, with societies becoming more affluent, people would be increasingly health conscious.

"As people become more conscious of health, life expectancy rises. Coupled with low fertility, there will be a change in the age distribution in the population with an increase in the number of old people."

Fuchs said health care would become more important because the elderly would need greater attention and support.

All these factors, he said, would combine to create a situation where an increasing proportion of the Gross Domestic Product would be devoted to health care.

Political pressure for a more egalitarian society would also pose a challenge for governments as societies would demand an equally high standard of health care for all.

But, "Whether it be a national health system or a privately financed one, governments will play an important role directly or indirectly," he said.

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