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Marina concerned over HIV screening methods

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Malaysian AIDS Foundation chairman Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir today voiced concern over the Health Ministry's methods of conducting the proposed HIV screening programme for pregnant women.

"The intention is good," she said, "but I am not sure whether the approach will be effective."

Marina was speaking at Universiti Malaya after presenting a RM10,000 cheque which was the foundation's contribution to the Second AIDS Awareness Week '97 organised by Za'aba Residential College.

The programme will be held from Oct 18 to Nov 4, and includes activities such as charity dinners, workshops and seminars on acquired immune deficiency syndrome awareness.

Last January, Health Minister Datuk Dr Chua Jui Meng said the Ministry was proposing voluntary human immunodeficiency virus screening for pregnant women.

It would also set up group counselling sessions for those who were positively identified as having the virus.

Marina said the proposed group counselling sessions, which would use video images as a tool, might not even be able to be classified as a counselling session.

She contended that group counselling also lost the opportunity to educate those who were HIV-negative about the dangers of AIDS.

The Ministry's programme seemed to concentrate on women without considering that the risk of infection lay more with the father, she added.

"The programme should also focus more on the education aspect," she said, "because testing would not be good enough without the expectant mothers knowing what they were dealing with."

On HIV infection among dadah users Marina said anti-dadah agencies should produce better programmes to reduce the number of HIV infected addicts.

Nevertheless, Marina conceded that there were no programmes that could be considered successful in curbing AIDS.

"We are facing the problem of being socially diverse but with the tendency of having only one single programme for everybody," she said.

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