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Telemedicine link for all Hospital Pantai centres

Pratap Parameswaran

HOSPITAL Pantai Bhd (HPB) is expected to have its telemedicine facilities on-line and in operation by the end of the year, says its executive chairman and chief executive officer Mokhzani Mahathir.

To be set up at a cost of some RM10 million, the hub of its telemedicine activities will be eventually located at the group's new medical centre in Bangsar.

The group will build a RM85 million 350-room centre on a 2ha site adjacent to its existing Pantai Medical Centre. Until the new centre is up, the telemedicine facility will be located at a temporary site.

"We have identified four areas - oncology, pathology, radiology and cardiology - for telemedicine activities," Mokhzani said.

He said the group has talked to consultants in the UK, US, Australia, France and Germany to tap their expertise in this field.

Negotiations are expected to be finalised at the end of August.

With telemedicine, all the group's medical centres will be linked up electronically and each centre will be able to refer cases and send pictures and data to its main hub in Bangsar.

A patient's diagnosis can also be sent electronically to foreign consultants.

The telemedicine operations catering to the high-end must meet the highest standards so that "doctors can make an accurate diagnosis when they see a scan on the computer screen", Mokhzani said.

Complementing such services, the group will set up eight "diagnostic centres" in Peninsular Malaysia. The centres will act as points of collection from where information on serious cases will be transmitted to the group's medical centres in Penang or Kuala Lumpur, Mokhzani added.

To be built at a cost ranging from RM1 million to RM6 million for each centre, the group plans three small and five larger centres which will be manned by general practitioners and technicians, Mokhzani said.

"The project represents a key element in expanding our healthcare business," he added. "If all goes smoothly, the telemedicine operations will be up and running by the end of the year."

Telemedicine, which will be exploited to the maximum in the shortest possible time, will be an integral part of the group's healthcare provisions, he said.

HPB is also in final talks to build a medical centre in Johor. "A major property developer in Johor has asked us to build a centre there," Mokhzani said.

It also proposes to build another centre in Selangor. Both projects are to be finalised by August.

The group will also move its existing medical centre in Klang to a new site.

Speaking to reporters after HPB's annual general meeting in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, Mokhzani said HPB sold its stake in Singapore's Parkway Holdings Ltd in order to concentrate on the local healthcare sector.

"We wanted to be a regional player but we are losing out as a major player in the Malaysian domestic market," he said.

He said the sale in Parkway, which involved 60.18 million shares generating about RM686 million, was to reverse the situation. It now has the financial clout to carry out its plans for new hospitals and to upgrade existing facilities to keep up with the other private hospital

groups .

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