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Do more for intravenous drug users, says Marina

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Malaysian AIDS Council president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir today expressed disappointment that very little attention had been paid to rehabilitating intravenous drug users in the country.

She said although 70 per cent of dadah addicts tested positive for HIV were intravenous drug users, preventive measures were inadequate.

"Rather, after identifying those who are HIV-positive, this is followed by isolation and nothing else."

"Very little education is given to those who are not yet infected, nor care provided to those who already are. The result is, intravenous drug users become infected and the virus soon finds its way to the general population."

"The tragedy is that this process is predictable and preventable," she told the Asia-Pacific Seminar for Youth Activists on HIV/AIDS and Drug Abuse at the International Youth Centre in Bandar Tun Razak.

Organised by the World Youth Foundation, the seminar is aimed at instilling awareness on HIV/AIDS issues and dadah problems among youths in the participating countries, identifying the roles of an effective youth worker in handling issues of HIV/AIDS and dadah abuse, formulating guidelines to implement plans to overcome the problems and creating a network between participating organisations.

The two-day seminar was opened by Pemadam president Datuk Seri Megat Junid Megat Ayob.

Deliberating on the topic Overview of Drug Use and HIV/AIDS in the Asia-Pacific Region, Marina said HIV prevention work had been most successful when dadah users were treated as human beings.

"When dadah users are not denied basics such as food, shelter and medical care, those who have been working to educate them are able to proceed more successfully."

"The denial of human rights has simply led to mistrust and this has complicated all preventive efforts," she said, adding co-operation between government agencies and non-governmental organisations was essential to ensure success.

She said the stigmatisation and treatment of dadah users caused them to go into hiding and this dispersal required HIV/AIDS education workers to work even harder towards reaching this population.

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