

26/10/1998

Healthcare sector stands to benefit

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KUANTAN, Sun. - The Health Ministry will utilise the allocation from the 1999 Budget to build 144 hospitals and village clinics and also recruit 4,000 new staff throughout the country next year.

Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng said the building of new hospitals and the recruitment of staff were part of the Ministry's aim to provide better healthcare services to the community.

"The allocation provided for under the Budget which was announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who is also the First Finance Minister on Friday, will encourage the development of the healthcare sector."

"The allocation is for management purposes (RM3.6 billion), which is an increase of about 12.5 per cent compared to last year, and for development (RM900 billion), an increase of 28.5 per cent.

"This allocation will enable the health development programmes which had been planned by the Government before the economic slowdown to be carried out."

Chua said this when asked to comment on the 1999 Budget.

He added that the allocation showed the Government was always concerned with the health services which it provided to the people.

"The implementation of the projects including the building of the 144 hospitals and village clinics will further enhance the health facilities in the country.

"Furthermore, the charges in all the government hospitals and clinics will still be maintained although the Government has decided to build new facilities, and increase the number of doctors and staff," he said.

Chua added that a recent survey by the Ministry showed that the number of patients seeking treatment at government hospitals had increased, especially during the economic slowdown as the fees were more affordable.

"The Ministry will still maintain the current charges, which are among the lowest in the world," he said.

Besides this, Chua said, the Ministry would also ensure that there were sufficient facilities in all the government hospitals.

When asked to comment on the increased tax on alcoholic beverages and cigarettes, Chua said the increase would help promote a healthy lifestyle among Malaysians.

"We hope this will instil awareness among smokers and drinkers and make them stop the habit," he said.

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