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Doctors' help sought to list AIDS patients for 'combination therapy'

PETALING JAYA, Mon. - The Malaysian AIDS Foundation has written to 54 doctors in government hospitals and private clinics asking them to provide a list of HIV/AIDS patients who need "combination therapy".

The foundation's chairman Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir said the doctors' help was sought to recommend patients needing such treatment.

The hospitals include three in the Klang Valley, Selangor (two), Johor (three) and Sarawak (two).

Marina said "combination therapy", which is a combination of AZT and two or three drugs, was the best treatment.

The treatment costs between RM2,000 and RM2,400 per month per patient.

"As many people cannot afford to pay, the foundation has set up a fund to help poor patients obtain their combination therapy," she said at a Press conference after launching "Orchids for Valentine's" campaign today.

She, however, said the use of "protease inhibitors" was a better treatment for those who could afford it as it could weaken the virus but it was much more expensive.

Marina said the fund, known as "People With Aids Drug Assistance Scheme", was established in February last year.

It was part of the foundation's project to provide financial aid to poor HIV/AIDS patients.

Marina said the foundation hoped to dispense financial assistance to 30 patients by July.

"We can't help a lot because the drugs are expensive but we have to help them obtain the treatment. We can't just leave them to suffer.

"We had an initial fund of RM500,000 contributed by Association for Wives of Ministers and Deputy Ministers (Bakti) in July last year," she said, adding that it hoped to raise more funds from the public.

She said that to ensure the sustainability of the project, the foundation would channel 20 per cent of donations contributed by companies and other organisations towards the fund.

"We hope to continue providing financial assistance to patients for as long as they need it," she said.

The patients would be selected by doctors based on medical criteria, Marina said.

The criteria includes patients having CD4 counts below 200 and household income less than RM2,000. (CD4 is a standard measure of the immune system's functions.)

The "Orchids for Valentine's" campaign, jointly organised by a pharmaceutical company, Glaxo Wellcome (M) Sdn Bhd, and the foundation, will involve the distribution of 2,000 bouquets of orchids free to the public at 13 dining outlets in Petaling Jaya and Kuala Lumpur, on Saturday.

The flowers will also be given to the caregivers from the medical and non-governmental sectors.

The dining outlets are in the Nikko Hotel, Park Royal, Crown Princess, Kuala Lumpur Hilton, Petaling Jaya Hilton, Imperial Hotel, Carcosa Seri Negara, Alexis Bistro & Bar, The Jump, Hard Rock Cafe, Bon Ton Restaurant and TGI Friday's PJ.

Held for the second time, it was aimed at creating public awareness about people with HIV/AIDS and to discourage prejudice towards these people and their families.

Earlier, Marina received a bouquet of orchids from Hilda Devi Rajandran, 12, of Ozanam House.

Marina also delivered a talk about AIDS to 20 orphans from the home.

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