

AIDS figures too conservative, says Marina

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — The Health Ministry has yet to formulate estimates of HIV-related statistics despite the alarming increase in HIV infection, Malaysian AIDS Council president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir said today.

She said estimates such as that of the United Nations of 33.6 million HIV/AIDS cases worldwide were necessary to anticipate the effects of the disease on society and the economy for budgetary and training purposes.

“As more than 80 per cent of reported cases are between 20-39 years old, it is not only a social issue but an economic one in terms of workforce, care and treatment.”

Marina said the currently reported figure of 33,233 cases was extremely conservative, noting that according to the report, 95 per cent of people living with HIV/AIDS were male.

“This alone is an anomaly as we live in a largely heterosexual society; the five per cent female representation in these studies seems improbable.”

Dr Adeeba Kamaruzzaman, chairman of the council’s steering committee for treatment information, said even medical professionals tended to overlook the possibility of HIV infection in female patients.

On the issue of sex education in schools, Marina said MAC would continue to press for it as part of the council’s HIV/AIDS prevention programme.

Although the council had yet to receive an agreeable response from the Education Ministry, she was hopeful that newly-appointed Education Minister Tan Sri Musa Mohamad would take up the initiative.

Marina had earlier launched two tele-information services aimed at providing the public with accurate information on HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment.

The HIV/AIDS Interactive Infoline, sponsored by Bristol Myers-Squibb Sdn Bhd at (03)7077007 is a 24-hour service that enables users to obtain basic information via touch-phone. For other States, call 1-800-88-1848 weekdays from 8.30am to 5.30pm.