

Media should be more sensitive, says AIDS Council

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs: The Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC) has taken the media to task for what it sees as a lack of sensitivity in reporting on the HIV-tainted blood case.

MAC president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir said the handling of the issue by the media shows a lack of sensitivity, evidence of general breaches of confidentiality and the lack of counselling provided to the woman and her spouse.

The woman, a housewife was infected with HIV after receiving HIV contaminated blood at the Jitra Hospital.

Marina said the woman herself stated that the number of reporters visiting her home aroused the neighbours' curiosity, forcing her to disclose her identity.

Even before this, she said, there is evidence of general breaches of confidentiality such as the report that her son was told of her predicament by his teacher.

In addition, it is obvious that reporters were given access to the alleged donor and this may result in the donor being deemed the perpetrator of a crime when the occurrence was in fact due to a failure in the system.

She said both the husband and wife should be given proper and continuous counselling which is a prerequisite to testing anyone and before informing them of their HIV status.

Such a counselling may have

“averted the unnecessary sensationalising of the issue”, she said. SUN 19.5.2000

It is also crucial to inform the woman that HIV infection is not a death sentence, that treatments are available, and that infected people can live long and productive lives.

Marina said the issue also shows how the opting-out system where so-called “high-risk” groups such as homosexuals and drug users are advised against donating blood fails to adequately protect the blood supply.

“Donors may not identify themselves as part of such groups, few people think of themselves as promiscuous, or may not opt out because of the fear of stigmatisation,” she said.

Marina also said the case shows that ignorance about HIV is still pervasive throughout the Malaysian society.

“We know that anyone can be vulnerable to HIV infection and, therefore, making judgments about a person's lifestyle based on their HIV status is presumptuous,” she said.

Marina said the MAC welcomes the Cabinet's move to accept responsibility and supports the Health Ministry's plan to tighten the blood screening procedures to prevent a recurrence.

The government and donor have apologised while the woman has filed a suit against the government for RM100 million.