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Anonymous testing for HIV

DURING a recent public forum/talk on AIDS, Tahir Ismail interviewed Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir, president of the Malaysian AIDS Council, on the issue of why HIV testing is not a common procedure amongst some people.

Question: Perhaps it is the mentality of the high risk people that we need to focus on. For example, I have asked some high risk people on why don't they go for HIV test, and a common reply would be, "I don't have to. I only need to go and donate blood, and if they found my blood HIV positive, they will tell me." Any comments?

Answer: First of all, we don't use the term 'high risk people', but rather, 'high risk behaviour', which is applicable to anybody, and high risk behaviour can have many kinds. As far as mentality is concerned, it is all related to education. Only when people fear the risks, then they have the mentality to understand. And if they understand what the risks are and what these risks mean, then they are motivated for prevention.

Now, why do people use blood donation as a way of testing, despite declaration of being risk free? I think it is because it is a relatively confidential indirect approach. For a direct approach, when a person comes to a clinic and say, "I want to have a HIV test", the first question he would be asked is, "Why would you want an HIV test?"

This is the implication that a person doesn't want. Whereas, if you go for a blood donation, you are going in a crowd, you are donating blood like everyone else, there are no implications. As far as being informed, should the blood be tested HIV positive, the system should pick that up.