

16/05/2000

Nightmare for HIV-tainted blood recipient

Sharanjit Singh; M.K. Megan; Patrick Sennyah

ALOR STAR, Mon. - As a medical team is being assembled in Kuala Lumpur to investigate how a housewife here was given HIV-contaminated blood, the woman is bracing for a nightmarish life of being ostracised by friends and neighbours.

Despite the tragic circumstances, the housewife has come to accept that news of her poor condition could not remain hidden forever.

"People would find out sooner or later," said the housewife, who is married to a labourer and has four children between the ages of 12 and 21.

"I just don't know what to do ... my life has gone completely haywire," the 47-year-old woman told the New Straits Times from her home in Jitra. "I used to be active but all I can think of now is the uncertainty facing me and my family."

The housewife - who received the HIV-contaminated blood at the Jitra Hospital while undergoing treatment for severe menstrual pain last month - is reeling from the side-effects of her anti-HIV treatment.

Forced to consume a regimen of 15 pills daily since she was put on an anti-HIV treatment, the effects had been devastating - bouts of headaches, vomiting and fever, numb throat, loss of appetite and insomnia.

The independent medical team has to determine one primary aspect of the case: How did the blood come to be administered before it was screened - an obvious violation of the strict World Health Organisation regulation?

A Health Ministry source said test results of blood samples taken from the donor and victim - sent to the Institute for Medical Research - was expected tomorrow.

Deputy director-general of health Datuk Dr Ahmad Tajudin Jaafar said the Alor Star Health Department had already initiated investigations and would submit an initial report.

In the meantime, a Health Ministry source said the report, now 80 per cent complete, would be submitted to acting Health Minister Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn tomorrow.

Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng is attending a WHO meeting in Geneva and is expected to return on May 23.

Dr Ahmad Tajudin gave his guarantee that regulations on blood infusion adopted by Malaysian hospitals were among the best in the world.

"These include donor screening, blood testing using the most recent technology, proper storage and procedure for release and use," he said.

Meanwhile, Malaysian AIDS Council president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir expressed concern about whether the victim had received adequate counselling.

"The victim must be given basic information on HIV and how to go on living a productive life," she said.

(END)