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Press chided for breaching confidentiality

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Malaysian AIDS Council president Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir has criticised the Press for over-publicising the recent case of donated HIV-infected blood, saying it was a setback to the council's efforts to fight AIDS.

She said the Press was breaching the confidentiality of those involved in the case.

"What the Press did (revealing the identities) was grossly unfair. Since AIDS has a social stigma, the impact on those involved and their families is far greater than they (the Press) can imagine," she told a Press conference today.

"It has created enormous fear among the public to come out to test for HIV knowing that their identities would be easily disclosed.

"There is also a public mistrust in the blood supply and a misconception that people would get infected with HIV only through blood transfusion when actually cases like this are rare.

"The only way we can fight against AIDS is by getting people to come out and have the HIV antibody test and disseminate accurate information. Who would come out for testing now?" she asked.

Recently a 47-year old woman from Jitra, Kedah, was infected with HIV through a blood transfusion at the Jitra Hospital. The identities and pictures of the woman and the blood donor appeared in the newspapers.

Marina also announced that this year's International AIDS Memorial Day themed Break the Silence: Honour Every Death, Value Every Life would be held in Raub, Pahang next Sunday.

Earlier, Marina, who is also Malaysian AIDS Foundation chairman, launched a forum entitled "National HAART (Highly Active Antitrovial Therapy) Forum 2000.