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AIDS-Doctors

SENSITIVE DOCTORS NEEDED TO HANDLE AIDS SUFFERERS

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 1 (Bernama) -- Handling HIV/AIDS sufferers now requires doctors to be more educated, sensitive and responsive, a senior Health Ministry official said today.

Any unethical doctor from public or private hospitals and clinics found breaching patients' confidentiality would face appropriate action by the authority, said Deputy Director of the ministry's Infectious Disease Control Division (AIDS/STD) Datuk Dr Faisal Ibrahim.

"The action can be as simple as warning or salary deduction to a serious legal action, depending on the Disciplinary Board of the hospital," he said.

Dr Faisal told reporters this after the Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC) presented to the media a report entitled "Living With HIV/AIDS in Malaysia: Peer Documentation on Discrimination" in conjunction with World Aids Day today.

The report was presented by project team leader Dr Mary Huang and team members Patrick Foong and Joe Selvaratnam.

Dr Faisal was reacting to a disclosure by Malaysia Care Association officer Peter Daniel during a panel discussion later of a case study involving a doctor who revealed the condition of an HIV/AIDS patient to someone else without the patient's permission.

Daniel told the panel discussion that the patient was a drug addict who had tested positive for HIV/AIDS while in prison.

According to Daniel, the doctor claimed he felt incumbent to disclose the patient's HIV/AIDS condition to a third party for fear that he would spread the disease to others.

Daniel hoped the report would educate other infected persons to prepare themselves against any form of discrimination and how to put a stop to such discrimination.

"Now that their rights have been put on papers, they can take the name of of people involved in discriminating them, give the full story line and take it to the MAC or any non-governmental organisation involved so they can put a stop right there and then," Daniel said.

Meanwhile, MAC President Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir said the report may not be the ultimate one on discrimination faced by HIV/AIDS sufferers but it surely was a good start.

"At least, this document would make infected persons aware that they have right to better treatment and they have right to complain (if discriminated)," she said.

The report highlighted, among other things, infected persons' right to health care including insurance, privacy and confidentiality, employment, to marry and raise a family.

Ninety-five respondents, including eight transgender people, mainly from the Klang Valley were chosen for the study.

Foong said, 30.5 per cent of the respondents' HIV-positive status were revealed without their consent to health workers, family members, government officials, NGOs, police, among others.

Almost 60 per cent of those who had received such information later spread it others, he said.

Meanwhile, Dr Huang said, the documentation was adapted from a study designed by the Asia-Pacific Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (APN+) at their Human Rights Workshop in Hong Kong in May 1998.

"It may not be scientific but we are not trying to collect data on how widespread discrimination is but rather to collect some data on the fact that discrimination does occur in our community," Dr Huang added.

-- BERNAMA

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