

Panel proposes free drug therapy for AIDS victims

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By JANE RITIKOS

KUALA LUMPUR: Full-blown AIDS victims and those with low CD4 T-cell counts will be given triple therapy anti-retroviral drugs for free under a proposal by the Committee of Ministries on AIDS, which met yesterday.

Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng said the meeting proposed for the Government annual allocation of RM4.1mil for the purchase of the drugs to be increased to RM15mil, so that free triple therapy drugs could be provided for the two groups.

"At present, the anti-retroviral drugs are given to those with full-blown AIDS, HIV sufferers with low CD4 T-cell counts, pregnant mothers, children, hospital staff exposed to the virus and those who contracted HIV through blood transfusion," he said.

Chua however, said the present allocation was too low for the Government to provide triple therapy drugs for free and some still had to buy one or two of the drugs

themselves.

He said the proposal would be brought to the Cabinet for consideration soon. "The meeting proposed that those with AIDS are the first group to get free triple therapy drugs to help prolong their lives and allow them to lead fairly normal lives.

"The second target group will be those with low CD4 T-cell counts as they are those who are about to enter the AIDS stage," he said.

Chua added that out of the 35,000 surviving HIV cases in the country, 1,200 had contracted AIDS.

As for those outside the two groups, he said efforts were being made to make the drugs available more cheaply.

Chua also said that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had during Wednesday's Cabinet meeting suggested that alternative drugs such as herbs from India, claimed to be effective for HIV, be sourced as an alternative treatment.